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The Realm of Yoga

Vol. 114, No. 5

THE ROAD TO WISDOM



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Practice of Yoga*

THE Yogi must always practise. He should try to live alone; the companionship of different sorts of people distracts the mind; he should not speak much, because to speak distracts the mind; not work much, because too much work distracts the mind; the mind cannot be controlled after a whole day's hard work. One observing the above rules becomes a Yogi. Such is the power of Yoga that even the least of it will bring a great amount of benefit. It will not hurt anyone, but will benefit everyone.

When one begins to concentrate, the dropping of a pin will seem like a thunderbolt going through the brain. As the organs get finer, the perceptions get finer. These are the stages through which we have to pass, and all those who persevere will succeed. Give up all argumentation and other distractions. Is there anything in dry intellectual jargon? It only throws the mind off its balance and disturbs it. Things of subtler planes have to be realised. Will talking do that? So give up all vaintalk. Read only those books which have been written by persons who have had realisation.

the star Svati is in the ascendant, and a drop of rain falls into an oyster, that drop becomes a pearl. The oysters know this, so they come to the surface when that star shines, and wait to catch the precious raindrop. When a drop falls into them, quickly the oysters close their shells and dive down to the bottom of the sea, there to patiently develop the drop into the pearl. We should be like that. First hear, then understand, and then, leaving all distractions, shut your minds to outside influences, and devote yourselves to developing the truth within you. There is the danger of frittering away your energies by taking up an idea only for its novelty, and then giving it up for another that is newer. Take one thing up and do it, and see the end of it, and before you have seen the end, do not give it up. He who can become mad with an idea, he alone sees light. Those that only take a nibble here and a nibble there will never attain anything. They may titillate their nerves for a moment, but there it will end. They will be slaves in the hands of nature, and will never get beyond the senses.

Be like the pearl oyster. There is a pretty Indian fable to the effect that if it rains when

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
1.175, 1.176-177



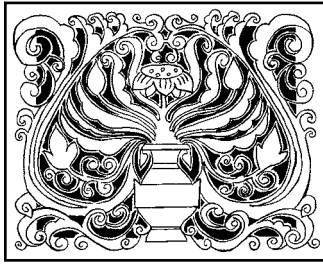
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Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat - 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
E-mail: prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata - 700 014
Tel: 91 - 33 - 2264 0898 / 2264 4000
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Yoga

May 2009
Vol. 114, No. 5

अग्निर्यत्राभिमथ्यते वायुर्यत्राधिरुध्यते ।
सोमो यत्रातिरिच्यते तत्र सञ्जायते मनः ॥

Where the fire is kindled by rubbing, where the air is controlled, where Soma flows over, there the (perfect) mind is born.

(*Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 2.6)

तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥

This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called yoga. One must then be vigilant, for yoga is subject to growth and decay.

(*Katha Upanishad*, 2.3.11)

तं विद्याद्दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसंज्ञितम् ।
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विण्णचेतसा ॥

Know that severance of contact with sorrow to be what is called yoga. That yoga is to be practised with perseverance and with an undaunted mind.

(*Bhagavadgita*, 6.23)

आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन ।
सुखं वा यदि वा दुःखं स योगी परमो मतः ॥

Him I hold to be the supreme yogi, O Arjuna, who looks on the happiness and sorrow of all beings as he looks on them in himself. (6.32)

मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः ।
बन्धाय विषयासक्तं मुक्त्यै निर्विषयं स्मृतम् ॥

The mind is verily the cause of bondage and liberation for humans. The mind attached to objects is known as the cause of bondage, and the unattached mind that of liberation.

(*Amritabindu Upanishad*, 2)

THIS MONTH

The term 'yoga' means both 'union' and 'concentration'. Yoga leads to union with the Divine, and concentration is the means to this union. Prana, the vital energy pervading the cosmos and suffusing our being, powers yoga. **Approaching Prana** properly is therefore crucial to success in the path of yoga, which this number features.

Yoga and Samadhi: Patanjali and Sri Ramakrishna is an analytical appraisal of some of the key elements of Patanjali's system of yoga and how its higher reaches are exemplified by Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences. The author, Swami Nirantarananda, is Principal, Probationers' Training Centre, Belur Math.

In **The Atman Cannot Be Realized by a Weakling**, Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh, writes about the various facets of strength and why they are of importance to a spiritual aspirant.

Kaivalya, isolation from the workings of Prakriti and establishment in the purity of the consciousness that is Purusha, is the ultimate goal of yoga. The light of discriminative knowledge, *prajna*, leads to *kaivalya*, bringing about profound changes in the yogi's mind. These transformations on the path of yoga are the subject of discussion in **The Seven Planes of Prajñā**, by Swami Alokanda of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi.

If biological evolution is the result of the 'infilling of nature', resulting from the removal of obstacles in the way to the manifestation of Prakriti, higher human evolution is essentially a process of transformation of consciousness. In **Yoga for Evolution of Human Consciousness**, Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaiyer, Lecturer, Department of Philosophy,

University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, discusses some important elements involved in this transformation.

Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is a comprehensive and eclectic process of spiritual transformation involving both individual effort and the descent of the Supramental. It includes important details of traditional Vedantic and yogic thought upon which Sri Aurobindo brings to bear his own insight. Dr K V Raghupathi, Assistant Professor, Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa, highlights some of these insights in **Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo**.

In the third instalment of **Sister Nivedita: Art for National Awakening**, Dr Anil Baran Ray, senior professor, Department of Political Science, Burdwan University, explores how Abanindranath Tagore helped fulfil Nivedita's dream of promoting 'Indianness in art'.



God's Own Abode is Dr Aparna Chattopadhyay's record of a fascinating pilgrimage to Naina Devi. The author is former professor of psychology, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.

In the seventh instalment of **Narada Bhakti Sutra**, Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, discusses the dangers of evil company and the ways to overcome them.

In the penultimate instalment of **Girish and Sri Sarada Devi**, Swami Chetanananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, writes about Holy Mother's visit to Girish's Durga puja.

EDITORIAL

Approaching Prana

*Prāṇo hyeṣa yaḥ sarvabhūtair-vibhāti
vijānan-vidvān-bhavate nātivādī;
Ātma-kṛīḍa ātma-ratiḥ kriyāvān
eṣa brahma-vidān varīṣṭhaḥ.*

This one indeed is Prana that shines variously through all beings. Knowing this the wise one has no more the need to go beyond anything in talk. Disporting in the Self, delighting in the Self, engrossed in (spiritual) effort, this one is the chief among the knowers of Brahman.

—*Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.4

THE process of pranayama has long been inextricably interlinked with Hindu religious thought. Originating with the Vedic concept of prana, developed as a systematic process of control of vital bodily and psychic energies in the system of yoga, and blended seamlessly with daily worship and *upāsana*, it has remained an integral part of the daily lives of millions of Hindus for over two millennia.

The *Prashna Upanishad* tells us that prana and *rayi*, energy and matter, were the first products of evolution. ‘At the beginning and at the end of a cycle everything becomes *ākāśa* [or *rayi*, subtle matter] and all the forces that are in the universe resolve back into prana; in the next cycle, out of this prana is evolved everything that we call energy, everything that we call force. ... The sum total of all forces in the universe, mental or physical, when resolved back to their original state, is called prana.’

Contemporary physicists would tell us that, prana and *ākāśa* being inter-convertible, prana may be viewed as the primal source of the universe. But the ancient Sankhya thinkers, on whose philosophical insights the system of yoga is based, were of the opinion that both prana and *ākāśa* are derivatives of *mahat*, the universal mind. Thus, not

only are our bodies and its energies ultimately derived from *mahat*, our minds too are born of and remain in continuity with the universal mind. It is this unique insight into the nature of the mind that provided the yogis the key to unlocking human mental powers.

Swami Vivekananda draws our attention to the true nature of prana in the human body: ‘The *citta*, in its threefold function of intelligence, consciousness, and mind, works and manufactures the forces called prana. You must at once get rid of the idea that prana is breath. Breath is one effect of prana. By prana are meant the nervous forces governing and moving the whole body, which also manifest themselves as thought. The foremost and most obvious manifestation of prana is the breathing motion. Prana acts upon air, and not air upon it. Controlling the breathing motion is pranayama. Pranayama is practised to get mastery over this motion; the end is not merely to control the breath or to make the lungs strong. ... These pranas are the vital forces which manipulate the whole body, while they in their turn are manipulated by other organs in the body, which are called mind or internal organs.’

The breathing exercises in pranayama are but the most basic attempts at mastery of the pranas. But in Patanjali’s system of yoga they are a means to the highest spiritual realization: ‘By the help of things on the material plane, we have to come to finer and finer [perceptions]. The universe is one, whatever point you touch. All the points are but variations of that one point. Throughout the universe is a unity (at bottom). ... Even through such a gross thing as breath I can get hold of the Spirit itself. By the exercise of breathing we begin to feel all the movements of the body that we [now] do not feel. As soon as we begin to feel them, we begin to master them.

Thoughts in the germ will open to us, and we will be able to get hold of them.'

So pranayama in Patanjali's yoga has more to do with awareness and concentration than breath per se. This is evident from Patanjali's assertion that mental steadiness and concentration may be attained by 'suspension of breath after exhalation,' *prachardana-vidhāraṇābhyāṁ vā prāṇasya*. He, in fact, defines pranayama as suspension of breath: *śvāsa-praśvāsyor-gati-vicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ*. This in later yogic terminology is *kumbhaka*. The different modes of inhalation, *pūraka*, and exhalation, *recaka*, that are part of such hatha yogic pranayamas as *nāḍi śodhana* or *anuloma viloma*, alternate-nostril breathing, *bhastrikā*, bellows breathing, and *kāpāla-bhāti*, 'glowing forehead', are all treated as preparatory to *kumbhaka* for the spiritual aspirant.

Mahapurush Swami Shivananda explains the importance of *kumbhaka*: 'When you read a sensational storybook or the history of a new country, or are engaged in solving a difficult mathematical problem, you become so much absorbed in it that so long as the story is not finished or the problem not solved, you cannot tear yourself away from it. On such occasions if you but pay attention to your breathing you will find that it has become very very slow. ... From these examples it is clear that when the mind is deeply concentrated on any matter, the function of respiration naturally slows down or stops—pranayama is done automatically. ... Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Great is the attachment of a mother to her child, of a devoted wife to her husband, and of a miser to his wealth. If one can luckily feel such attachment for God, then one can realize God within a short time." When the heart is filled with such intense longing for God, respiration almost stops.'

Swami Hariharananda Aranya observes: 'Pranayama practised with a restless mind cannot be regarded as a part of yoga. Pranayama does not become conducive to samadhi unless steadiness of the body and one-pointedness of the mind on one subject are maintained along with suspension of breath. ... The mind has to be kept fixed on the object of meditation by the same effort by which

suspension of breath is attained with the feeling that the object itself were being held, as though in a tight mental embrace.' He also reminds us of the importance of awareness during *pūraka* and *recaka*: 'During inhalation one must feel the touch of breath spreading throughout the body. During exhalation this sensation must be gathered back into the region of the heart from the entire body.' This awareness takes one to the interface of the body and mind, generates awareness of the psychic prana pervading the body, and is the first step in controlling and redirecting this prana. Such hatha yoga procedures as the three *bandhas*—*mūla*, *uddiyana*, and *jālandhara*, which grossly involve the contraction of the pelvic, abdominal, and cervical muscles respectively—also have the aim of controlling prana in its subtle motor aspect.

For the spiritual aspirant pranayama in its initial stages has the express purpose of harnessing and controlling the unruly vital energies of the body and the mind. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* provides an apt simile: 'The person of well-regulated endeavours controls the prana, and when it has become quiet, breathes out through the nostrils. The persevering sage holds the mind as a charioteer holds the restive horses.' Just as tenacity and care is required to break a wild horse in, the yogi needs to persevere and be careful to avoid all sensory excitation till the pranas are mastered.

Even as the individual pranas are being controlled, one must also open oneself to the cosmic Prana. Prana or Sutratman is the cosmic body of Ishvara, the Divine. And divine grace involves transfer of energies from cosmic to individual levels. Swami Vivekananda tells us how we can actually go about opening ourselves to the workings of the cosmic Prana: 'The last and highest manifestation of prana is love. The moment you have succeeded in manufacturing love out of prana, you are free. It is the hardest and the greatest thing to gain. You must not criticize others; you must criticise *yourself*. If you see a drunkard, do not criticize him; remember he is you in another shape.' This is what we need to set our sights on when we practise pranayama. ❧

Yoga and Samadhi: Patanjali and Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Nirantarananda

INDIAN history and culture are intimately related to a pair of systems: Sankhya and yoga. The Sankhya is considered the most ancient of all Indian philosophies. That is why Swami Vivekananda observed: ‘There is no philosophy in the world that is not indebted to Kapila [founder of the Sankhya system].’¹ The Mahabharata says that all the unique philosophical insights and extraordinary discoveries spread across the Vedas and the mythological tradition of the Puranas are to be found in the Sankhya system. The great sage Kapila is recognized as *ādi-vidvān*, the first wise person. Moreover, the Mahabharata says that ‘there is no knowledge like Sankhya and there is no strength like yoga.’²

The influence of Patanjali’s yoga system on all Hindu schools of thought can never be over-emphasized. Great Advaitins like Shankaracharya, Anandagiri, Vidyaranya, Madhusudana Saraswati, and Sadananda Yogindra admitted the indispensability of yoga for the achievement of intuitive experience. The sage Yajnavalkya says that ‘the supreme Dharma is Self-knowledge through yoga.’

Though traditionally distinguished as two distinct philosophies, Sankhya and yoga are inseparably intertwined. Swami Hariharananda Aranya, a great yogi of recent times profoundly versed in the scriptures, refers to the verse of the Bhagavadgita which states that ‘fools, not scholars, consider the systems of Sankhya and yoga as different.’³ In his eyes these systems are two components of a whole—much like the chest and back of the human body, one cannot be separated from the other.

It has been pointed out that yoga accepts the existence of Ishvara, a Supreme Ruler, while Sankhya denies it. Others, however, have opined that in an-

cient times both systems accepted Ishvara, but in course of time, due to the influence of nihilistic Buddhist philosophy, Sankhya abandoned this concept of a unique Supreme Being. In consequence, Sankhya was denominated *nirīśvara* Sankhya, Godless Sankhya, while yoga came to be called *śeśvara* Sankhya, or Sankhya with God.

Yoga philosophy has been so extensively cultivated, both as religion and secular practice, that the word ‘yoga’ now carries multiple meanings covering vast areas of knowledge and practice. The Bengali encyclopaedia *Viswakosha* interprets the term ‘yoga’ in as many as forty-three ways, while Kalivara Vedantavagisha, in his book *Patanjala Yoga-darshana*, has given seventeen meanings for the word ‘yoga’.

India has always been identified, across the globe, as the country of yoga. Yoga centres have been coming up in many countries over the last fifty years, and millions now feel attracted to its practices for various reasons.

Yoga

The word ‘yoga’ is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning i) to unite and ii) to concentrate. Therefore, etymologically ‘yoga’ means both union and concentration. The traditional yoga system accepts the second meaning; the first—union—is clearly rejected. The great sage Patanjali gave two technical meanings to the word ‘yoga’, based on two particular states of concentration: *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta*. In the first aphorism of his *Yoga Sutra* Patanjali promises a *yoga-anuśāsana*, a revised treatise on yoga. And in the second sutra he gives a definition of yoga: ‘*Yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*; suppression of *vṛttis*, modifications of the mind, is

yoga.’ Since Patanjali did not use the phrase ‘*sarva-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, suppression of *all* states or modifications of the mind’, *samprajñāta*, though containing *vṛttis* pertaining to a single object, is included along with *asamprajñāta*, wherein all mental modifications are suppressed, as another meaning of the word ‘yoga’. A yogi first realizes the *samprajñāta* state, then the *asamprajñāta*. To realize any state of yoga a yogi must practise certain disciplines. That is why the state of yoga is called *aṅgin*, the principal, and the disciplines needed to achieve it are *yogāṅgas*, the subsidiaries—just as the human being is the *aṅgin* and the various parts of the human body are the *aṅgas*. These limbs of yoga are eight in number: *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*. Each of these eight steps is a yoga discipline and is an aid to the subsequent step. Vyasa, the commentator on the *Yoga Sutra* quotes an ancient yogi saying that yoga can be known through and proceeds from yoga alone: *yogena yogo jñātavyo yogo yogāt pravartate*.⁴ With respect to *samprajñāta* yoga, the last three—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—are internal means, *antarāṅga*, while the five preceding limbs are considered external, *bahirāṅga*. With regard to the *asamprajñāta* state, even the last three steps are viewed as external practices.

Patanjali discusses the twofold means of yoga in the twelfth aphorism of the first chapter of the *Yoga Sutra*, in which he says that yoga can be achieved through practice and detachment. Practice here means the efforts that enable a yogi to remain in a steady state of mind while cultivating all the eight limbs of yoga. Detachment implies the consciousness of supremacy of a yogi who has given up desires for objects either seen or heard of. Through this sort of detachment and practice one is supposed to reach the state of yoga. And this is called *samprajñāta* yoga or the state of yoga that contains an object. This detachment, technically termed *vaśīkāra*, is again inferior to the detachment that consists of indifference towards the three *guṇas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. This is the highest detachment, *para-vairāgya*, and it arises through

knowledge of the nature of the Puruṣa, the soul.

Patanjali discusses *samprajñāta* yoga in the seventeenth sutra of the first chapter. He says that the four types of *samprajñāta* yoga come one after another to a yogi, the divisions being based on the nature of the objects and also on the power of concentration. The four divisions are termed *savitarka*, *savicāra*, *sānanda*, and *sāsmīta*. Through *para-vairāgya*, supreme detachment, a yogi can attain the objectless *asamprajñāta* state devoid of all mental modifications.

On properly analysing these limbs of yoga one is surprised to note Patanjali’s deep spiritual insight as well as immense skill in guiding the aspirant gradually and systematically to progressively higher states of yoga, beginning from the very basics. The first two steps, *yama* and *niyama*, abstentions and observances, result in calmness of body and mind, which are essential prerequisites of success in yoga. This preliminary moral training also provides the aspirant with a solid ground which helps avoid future digressions from the main purpose of the practice of yoga. The next step, *āsana*, perfects one’s control over the physical body. Then comes *prāṇāyāma*, which brings about the control of the *prāṇas*, inner energies of the body-mind complex. It is followed by *pratyāhāra*, control over the sense organs by detaching them from the external environment and turning them inwards. These are the first five limbs of yoga.

Samadhi

Samadhi is the highest stage of concentration. It is worth noting that Patanjali has taken samadhi as one of the *yogāṅgas*, the last one. He defines this *yogāṅga samādhi* in the third sutra of the third chapter. This samadhi is also called *samādhi-mātra* or ‘mere samadhi’. The last three practices in the scheme of yoga—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—are intended to deepen the concentration of the mind; so they are different from the previous five, not in kind but in degree. *Dhāraṇā*, fixed attention, matures into *dhyāna*, meditation, and *dhyāna* matures into *samādhi*, deep absorption of the mind.

Dhāraṇā, according to Patanjali, is riveting or fastening the mind to one object, external or internal. When *dhāraṇā* flows on continually through similar *pratyayas*, conscious thoughts, without getting interrupted by thoughts of other objects, it is called 'dhyana'. In order to differentiate *dhāraṇā* from dhyana some scholars seem to interpret *dhāraṇā* as the first stage in the practice of concentration, marked by the temporary fixity of mind on a given object—a fixity that tends to get interrupted by thoughts of other objects—while dhyana is a higher state of concentration which is not interrupted by any other thought. Such *dhāraṇā*, however, can be considered the very nature of the common human mind; it cannot be the *yogāṅga* that is enjoined as a practice for an aspirant to yoga. In this context it may be useful to consider the interpretation given by Swami Hariharananda Aranya, who has provided a consistent explanation on this point. He says: 'In Dhāraṇā ... the thought-process on the same object is intermittent and in succession' (251); and he gives a beautiful simile: 'If flow of knowledge in Dhāraṇā may be compared to succession of similar drops of water, in Dhyāna the flow of knowledge is continuous like flow of oil or honey' (ibid.).

Patanjali defines samadhi thus: When concentration becomes so intense that dhyana loses, as it were, its real nature and the mind is full of the revelation of the object concentrated upon, being devoid of the consciousness of *śabda* and *jñāna*, name and concept of the object, then dhyana develops into samadhi. Due to the tremendous influence of the object concentrated upon, at this stage the *dhyātā*, meditator, and dhyana, the act of meditation, drop off from the consciousness of the yogi. In simpler language we may say that the yogi forgets himself in samadhi. The real nature of dhyana is *pratyaya*, reflective knowledge, that consists in the awareness of three elements: *dhyātā*, dhyana, and *dhyeya*, the object meditated upon—in other words the consciousness that 'I am meditating on an object'. When dhyana becomes devoid of *pratyaya*, that is, the meditator and the process

of meditation are lost sight of, then it is no more mere dhyana, it has ripened into samadhi. This is called *samādhi-mātra* or mere deep absorption of the mind on a particular object because it does not involve any 'supernatural' knowledge and can be attained even by an otherwise untrained mind.

The samadhi just defined may take place in any state of mind. Mind is said to have five *bhūmis*, planes of existence. These planes are habitual states or types of mind: *kṣipta* restless, *mūḍha*, stupefied, *vikṣipta*, distracted, *ekāgra*, one-pointed, and *nirudha*, arrested. It is worth noting that samadhi in any of the first three *bhūmis* of the mind does not give the yogi a steady enlightenment; in consequence the yogi remains far from liberation. In contrast, the samadhi that occurs when the mind is in *ekāgra* state brings forth *prajñā*, steady supernatural enlightenment, also called *puruṣa-khyāti*, the knowledge of Puruṣa, by which alone the yogi attains liberation. *Puruṣa-khyāti* and *viveka-khyāti*, discriminative knowledge, are one and the same thing. Therefore, the goal of yoga is not mere arrest of the mind or only the practice of *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and the rest, but the pure knowledge of the divine and free nature of Puruṣa. It can be affirmed that the yoga system puts emphasis on knowledge and not on *prāṇāyāma* or mere stillness of mind. This may be the answer to the contention held by some scholars against yoga, which practice they find unworthy because it leads to arrest of the mind and not to the knowledge of Reality. True knowledge cannot unfold in the restless mind. Swami Vivekananda says that samadhi or concentration is the source of all knowledge: 'There is only one method by which to attain this knowledge, that which is called concentration.'⁵

Even the name of the object meditated upon drops off from the consciousness of the yogi. Sri Ramakrishna probably meant this fact when on a certain occasion he explained his experience of samadhi to his disciples: 'With the realization of Satchidānanda one goes into samādhi. Then duties drop away. Suppose I have been talking about the oṣṭād and he arrives. What need is there of talking

about him then? How long does the bee buzz around? So long as it isn't sitting on a flower.⁶

Samprajñāta yoga refers always to an object and to the fourfold ways of meditating on that object: *śavitarka*, on gross forms, *śavicāra*, on subtle aspects, *śānanda*, on the bliss derived from calming the senses and the mind, and *śāsmīta*, on the I-sense of the meditator. The yogis adept at these samadhis are destined to attain four upward hierarchical planes of *brahma-loka*, the world of Brahma, after death. These adepts are called *acyuta*, *śuddhanivāsa*, *satyābha*, and *śamjñāśamjñī* respectively.⁷ As they are still devoid of the knowledge of Purusha, they are not liberated souls and hence they have to strive further for liberation.

Patanjali dived very deep into the highest realms of mental concentration, explored the finest ways of direct experience of realities, and called these states of mind *samāpattis*, states of engrossment. *Samāpatti* too is fourfold: *śavitarka* and *nirvitaraka* involve engrossment in gross objects; *śavicāra* and *nirvicāra*, subtle objects. These *samāpattis* take place when the mind becomes habitually tranquil and one-pointed and, like a polished crystal, faithfully transmits the form of the object on which it rests, whether the object is the self that cognizes, the instrument of cognition, or the objects of cognition.⁸ In the *śavitarka* and *śavicāra* *samāpattis* there coexists an admixture of name, meaning or object, and knowledge of the given object. These two *samāpattis* do not come within the purview of the definition of samadhi, in which the mind has the revelation of the object alone; hence, these two states cannot be called samadhi. Swami Hariharananda does not like to compare these *samāpattis* to mere samadhi because he thinks *samāpattis* are much higher states of mind than *samādhi-mātra*. *Samāpattis* produce *samprajñāna*, subtle supernatural knowledge.

A yogi aims at the *prajñā* of Purusha, *puruṣa-khyāti* or *viveka-khyāti*, and having attained it he is called *jīvanmukta*, liberated in life. By the yogi's repeated efforts this *viveka-khyāti* matures and then flows uninterruptedly. At this stage the yogi real-

izes that he or she is still attached to the material Prakriti through the much-coveted *viveka-khyāti*. This happens because *viveka-khyāti* is also a product of the intellect, and the intellect cannot function without being identified with Purusha. A golden chain is, after all, a chain too. The pure mind of the yogi feels great disgust even for this 'golden' bondage and strives to give up this *viveka-khyāti* as well. When this is given up, one reaches the objectless state of mind: *asamprajñāta*. This gives that great yogi the taste of *kaivalya*, a state of aloneness.

This great disgust even with *viveka-khyāti* is indeed supreme detachment! This would give us some idea of the immensity of strength emerging from a pure mind. It is a universal law that the three mental characteristics of strength, purity, and detachment are directly proportional to one another. The yogi harnesses these mental powers to the fullest in the service of yoga.

The *asamprajñāta* state leading to *kaivalya* is one kind of *nirbīja* state, the state without an object. It is termed *upāya-pratyaya*. *Upāya* refers to 'means of yoga', and leads to this *nirbīja* state. Another kind of *nirbīja* state is called *bhava-pratyaya*, in which the impressions responsible for *bhava*, birth, are responsible for *nirbīja* samadhi as well. This *bhava-pratyaya* *nirbīja* state does not lead to mukti, liberation, because the yogis happen to reach this state without realizing *viveka-khyāti*. They will become either *videha*, disembodied, or *prakṛti-laya*, merged in Prakriti. After the samskaras or mental impressions leading to the *nirbīja* state are weakened, these yogis are born again in some world.

It is notable that by the practice of all the eight limbs of yoga the yogi first realizes *samprajñāta* yoga, by which he or she is blessed with *prajñā*, and then the brightness of this knowledge gradually increases and culminates in *viveka-khyāti*. This discriminative experience alone can liberate the yogi, who now understands that one's real nature is the Purusha, separate from *buddhi* or intellect. Keeping this view in mind Bhojaraja, in his gloss on the *Yoga Sutra*, remarks that yoga is that which in fact is interpreted as *viyoga*, separation, by Patanjali.

Sri Ramakrishna and Yoga

In the modern age Sri Ramakrishna is the unparalleled exemplar of the samadhi state. He explored the vast expanse and profound depths of the ocean of samadhi—the range, depth, and frequency of his experiences in that state are without compare even among the greatest spiritual giants of human history. In him we find a harmonious blend of the paths of jnana, bhakti, karma, and yoga; he was a yogi par excellence. Once a man happened to close his umbrella in front of him; seeing this, his pure mind remembered the art of concentration and immediately merged into samadhi. Some of his valuable experiences have been recorded by one of his disciples, Mahendranath Gupta, in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Granting that the four yogas or the complex pathways of the Tantras may appear different from one another in the eyes of beginners, Sri Ramakrishna, with his characteristic harmonious outlook born of direct spiritual experience, stated that these disciplines are paths converging on the vision of God and ultimately leading to the non-dual experience. He expresses his vision thus: 'After passing the six centres, the aspirant arrives at the seventh plane. Reaching it, the mind merges in Brahman. The individual soul and the Supreme Soul become one. The aspirant goes into samādhi. His consciousness of the body disappears. He loses the knowledge of the outer world. He does not see the manifold any more. His reasoning comes to a stop.'⁹ He seems to include in the school of yoga the six centres described in the Tantras, comparing them with the seven planes of Vedānta. 'There is much similarity,' he says, 'between the seven "planes" described in the Vedānta and the six "centres" of Yoga' (ibid.).

Sri Ramakrishna illustrates with a simile the state of yoga which Patanjali defines as 'suppression of the waves of the mind': 'His [the yogi's] eyes are wide open, with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs, and there is a vacant look in her eyes' (113). He divides the yoga tradition

in two parts: hatha yoga and raja yoga. 'The hatha-yogi practises physical exercises. His goal is to acquire supernatural powers: longevity and the eight psychic powers. These are his aims. But the aim of rājayoga is the attainment of devotion, ecstatic love, knowledge, and renunciation. Of these two, rājayoga is the better' (244–5). For common aspirants he advised the practice of raja yoga, not hatha yoga. He would rather say to an enquirer: 'Those [hatha yoga] practices are not meant for this age. In this Kaliyuga people are short-lived and their existence depends on food alone. Where is the time now to make the body strong by practising hatha yoga, and then to call on God through raja yoga.'¹⁰

It is interesting to note that Sri Ramakrishna always thought of raja yoga in relation to God. He said, 'Rājayoga describes how to achieve union with God through the mind—by means of discrimination and bhakti.'¹¹ For him there is no difficulty in seeing a relation between the yogic practices of *prāṇāyāma* and samadhi and the bhakti practices of weeping for the vision of God, singing God's name, and the like. According to Patanjali, *prāṇāyāma* culminates in perfection of *kumbhaka*, suspension of breath. Regarding this Sri Ramakrishna says, 'If a man is able to weep for God, he will see Him. He will go into samādhi. Perfection in yoga is samādhi. A man achieves kumbhaka without any yogic exercise if he but weeps for God. The next stage is samādhi' (344).

Sri Ramakrishna sees samadhi as a means to the direct and immediate knowledge of reality. In samadhi all doubts about reality are set at naught, and reasoning also stops. In *jaḍa samādhi* the ego vanishes, whereas in *cetana samādhi* it remains 'like a line'. By *jaḍa samādhi* or *sthira samādhi* and *cetana samādhi* he probably means *nirvikalpa samādhi* and *bhāva samādhi* or *savikalpa samādhi* respectively (478). In *bhāva samādhi* a devotee, with a trace of ego, tastes and enjoys God and his lilas, divine plays. He loses all consciousness of the outer world. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* physical functions of the *jñāni* tend to stop. After a lot of effort, ordinary aspirants can rise to the stage of *nirvikalpa samādhi*,

but they cannot come back to the level of the ordinary world. Only *īśvarakotis*, those born with a special divine purpose, or *avatāras*, incarnations of the Supreme Being, can come down from *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Ordinary aspirants, *jīvakotis*, live in that state for twenty-one days and then their life-breath passes away; their body falls like a dry leaf from a tree. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna dwelt in the *nirvikalpa* state almost uninterruptedly for six months. During that period he was not conscious of time, the coming of day or the passing of night. He expresses that condition thus: 'Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body, but I did not feel them. My hair became matted with dust. Sometimes I did not know when the call of nature was answered.'¹² Sri Ramakrishna describes another type of samadhi called *unmanā samādhi*: 'One attains it by suddenly gathering the dispersed mind.'¹³

The loss of external consciousness in *nirvikalpa samādhi* confused some people, including great intellectuals of Sri Ramakrishna's time. For instance, Shivanath Shastri and a few others considered Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi a disease. This contention is entirely ungrounded. First, this type of samadhi was never reported to have disturbed Sri Ramakrishna's physical health. Second, his ethical values formed a standard worthy of emulation by all others. Third, his entire life was a great manifestation of wisdom, love, purity, bliss, and peace. It was a blessing to the entire humanity. His strength of mind was also extraordinary. To arguments of the above type Sri Ramakrishna would say: 'How can one become unconscious by thinking of Him whose Consciousness has made the whole world conscious?' (256).

The mystical kundalini power remains dormant in ordinary souls, but diligent yogis can awaken it through spiritual practices. All the mental modifications or moods that arise in the mind produce samskaras. These samskaras accumulate at the base of the spine, a place called *mūlādhāra* in yoga terminology. The sum total of all these impressions in a person is the kundalini. It is a great

power that impels the person to engage in activity. When the kundalini awakens and moves up towards the *saḥasrāra*, the yogic centre at the crown of the head, through the six centres—*mūlādhāra*, *svādhīsthāna*, *maṇipūra*, *anāhata*, *viśuddha*, and *ājñā*—new subtle vistas are revealed to the aspirant. Sri Ramakrishna uses the simplest language to describe his experience of the awakening of kundalini: 'Look, something moves upward from the feet to the head, creeping along with a tingling sensation. As long as it does not reach the brain, I remain conscious; but the moment it does, I completely forget myself. Even the eyes and the ears cease to function, and speech is out of the question. ... The very distinction of "I" and "you" vanishes.'¹⁴ This account is a testimony to the close relation between the body and the mind. When the kundalini awakens, aspirants feel less attracted to sense objects. Food and sleep lose all charm. Such aspirants do not like the company of people disinterested in yoga. Sri Ramakrishna was unable to keep the company of worldly people; he would feel suffocated, as though his *mahāvāyu*, life force, would leave his body. His *mahāvāyu* would rush rapidly to his head.

On 21 July 1883 Sri Ramakrishna visited Adhar Sen's house in Kolkata. Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, started singing a song in praise of the Divine Mother. When he sang the lines, 'Above, in the throat, is the sixteen-petalled lotus flower, of smoky hue; / Within the petals of this flower there lies concealed a subtle space, / Transcending which, one sees at length the universe in Space dissolve', Sri Ramakrishna told one of the devotees that this was the description of the vision of Satchidananda, the formless Brahman. 'The Kundalini, rising above the Viśuddha chakra, enables one to see everything as ākāśa. ... One attains the Absolute by going beyond the universe and its created beings conjured up by māyā. By passing beyond the Nāda [the primeval sound of Creation] one goes into samādhi. By repeating "Om" one goes beyond the Nāda and attains samādhi.'¹⁵ It is clear from his vision and its explanation that when the kundalini reaches

the level of the *ājñā* chakra, one sees the Reality without form through 'a thin veil, as transparent as glass'. Penetrating beyond this chakra the yogi gets merged in the indescribable Brahman.

Yoga Today

Yogic practices are nowadays hugely popular the world over. These practices have entered every walk of human life and exercise a lot of influence. Though Patanjali contributed his plan of yoga theories and practices for one single purpose—to ensure spiritual freedom, *kaivalya*—most people follow this path in order to attain secular ends like physical health, beauty, miraculous powers, a peaceful life free from mental anxieties and tension, and things of this sort. Many have benefited from such yogic practices as *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and meditation, which help improve concentration of mind, skills, and work efficiency. Others have been cured of different diseases by following specific yogic disciplines. Even the UNESCO is now working to promote yoga practices. The people and governments of Italy and France are sincerely thinking of introducing yoga in their educational institutions with the aim of helping children improve mental concentration. This sort of distortion in purpose might not annoy Patanjali too much, but he would certainly be unhappy to see incompetent people trying to practise yoga—for whatever motive, spiritual or secular. Without being grounded in ethical living none can achieve success in yoga. That is why Patanjali enjoins *yama* and *niyama* at the very outset. These two practices are the very foundation of the yogi's life. Without this foundation one remains far from success; rather, one is likely to stumble and fall. Conversely, a person with strong moral character can develop greater power of concentration and become successful in any field of life. That is why Swami Vivekananda warned: "There must be perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed; without it the practice of Raja-Yoga is dangerous, and may lead to insanity."¹⁶

Sri Ramakrishna too emphasized the need for ethical values, three of which are especially import-

ant: truth, purity, and unselfishness or love. One who is given to lust and greed can never attain yoga: 'How can one attain yoga? By completely renouncing attachment to worldly things. The mind must be pure and without blemish, like the telegraph wire that has no defect.'¹⁷

That Patanjali based all the yogic ideas and practices discussed in the *Yoga Sutra* on the Sankhya philosophy becomes evident from the interpretations of the sutras by different commentators. According to Patanjali, love for and contemplation on God is but a means to the attainment of yoga;¹⁸ for him yoga means concentration of mind, not union with a deity. But Sri Ramakrishna's teachings on yoga are based on his own experiences, which, when rationally interpreted, lead to Vedantic conclusions. For Sri Ramakrishna God-realization is the very aim of human life. Therefore, he has no difficulty in taking yoga to mean union between the devotee and the Divine.



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The Atman Cannot Be Realized by a Weakling

Swami Brahmeshananda

‘**N**AYAMATMA BALAHINENA LABHYA; the Atman cannot be realized by a weakling.’¹ This famous declaration of the *Mundaka Upanishad* stresses the need for strength in spiritual life. Sri Krishna too, at the very beginning of his sermon in the Bhagavadgita, urges Arjuna to give up unmanliness and mental weakness, *hridaya daurbalya*, and stand up and fight. Swami Vivekananda goes to the extent of declaring this verse as containing ‘the whole message of the Gita’. For, travelling through the length and breadth of India, he had observed at first hand that Indians were steeped in extreme inertia. He therefore asked young men to play football, build their muscles, and gain greater mental and physical stamina to be able to appreciate Sri Krishna’s message. Among the saints and sages of India it was Swami Vivekananda alone who laid such great stress on strength for spiritual life. Some of his utterances on this topic, though well-known, bear recalling:

I once met a man in my country whom I had known before as a very stupid, dull person, who knew nothing and had not the desire to know anything, and was living the life of a brute. He asked me what he should do to know God, how he was to get free. ‘Can you tell a lie?’ I asked him. ‘No,’ he replied. ‘Then you must learn to do so. It is better to tell a lie than to be a brute, or a log of wood. You are inactive; you have not certainly reached the highest state, which is beyond all actions, calm and serene; you are too dull even to do something wicked.’²

In Madras, after his return from the West, addressing some students Swamiji said: ‘First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through

football than through the study of the Gita. ... You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger’ (3.242).

‘Strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death’ (2.3).

‘Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All strength and succour you want is within you’ (2.225).

‘What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist’ (3.190).

‘It is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil. And what causes fear? Ignorance of our own nature’ (3.160).

These forceful utterances of Swami Vivekananda not only stress the need for a healthy body but also for other virtues like fearlessness, strong will, and self-confidence. We shall take up some of these values and discuss them one by one.

Physical Strength

There is a wrong notion, prevalent in certain circles, that it is not essential to have a strong physical body for such spiritual practices as japa, meditation, and prayer, that one only needs the ability to concentrate the mind. This is not true. One need not have a muscular body like that of a wrestler, but a healthy body is absolutely essential for deep and prolonged meditation. The spiritual aspirant should be able to sit in a steady posture without movement for long hours. If the body is so feeble and delicate that one gets backache or pain in the legs on sitting for a short while, how can deep meditation be achieved?

If one sleeps for long hours during the day or the night, how much time will be dedicated to meditation? A physical body trained by regular exercise, *pranayama*, and *asana* needs less food and sleep. If one does not get one's regular diet on some day, or has to work harder than usual, one must still be able to meditate, ignoring these inconveniences. Such a healthy body is a spiritual aspirant's great asset. That is why the body is considered the foremost instrument for spiritual living: *Shriram adyam khalu dharma-sadhanam*.

It is precisely to train the physical body that Patanjali, in his system of yoga, prescribes *asana* and *pranayama* as disciplines preliminary to *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. Nowadays these practices have become extremely popular as a means of keeping the body fit and free from various diseases. But their primary aim is to make the physical body fit for meditation. During deep and prolonged meditation respiration becomes slow and even stops—*kumbhaka*, suspension of breath, takes place. It is believed by experts in meditation that to reach *samadhi* one must have the capacity to hold the breath for a much longer time than the normally possible. The mind must not be disturbed by the slightest physical movement, not even by breathing. It is not necessary however to do rigorous *pranayama*. Rhythmic breathing, with deep and prolonged inhalation and exhalation, conditions the lungs well for meditation. Daily free-hand exercise or brisk walk is also useful. Once these simple rules for keeping good health become habitual, one need not pay them additional attention.

In Jainism great stress is laid on meditation, and a number of meditation techniques are described in Jain scriptures. There too the need for a fit physical body is emphasized. Advanced meditation techniques can be practised only by a yogi who has a strong body. To bear the stress of deep and prolonged meditation a yogi's shoulders must be broad, the capacity of the lungs to hold air must be great, and even the bones must be strong. This physical structure is technically called *samhanana*, and yogis have an *uttama* or superior *samhanana*.

Though Sri Ramakrishna appears frail in the available pictures, he was not really so. He was tall and had broad shoulders. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi testified that when he sat on a broad wooden stool, he would cover the whole of it. All the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, with the exception of Swami Yogananda and Swami Premananda, had this *uttama samhanana*. Such a constitution is mostly obtained by birth but it can be developed, to some extent, by the practice of strict continence, *yogasanas*, and a regulated diet. Brahmacharya preserves physical and mental energies and also strengthens the nervous system, an extremely important requirement for meditation. Continence is essential for mental strength and for keeping the brain cool, without which meditation is not possible. Those who do not observe strict continence lose the ability to meditate for long hours.

Balanced Diet

Spiritual aspirants must be careful about their diet. They must avoid all extremes as advised by Sri Krishna in the Gita: 'Yoga is not attained by one who eats too much or who eats nothing at all, nor by him who sleeps too much or who keeps awake [too much], O Arjuna. One who is moderate in food and movements, in engagement in actions, and in sleep and wakefulness, attains to yoga which destroys misery.'³

An aspirant must never overeat. Although he may eat to his fill during the day, he must always take light food at night. Many aspirants take only one meal a day. They go on reducing the night meal and finally give it up altogether. Initially one may feel a little weak physically, but later the body gets adjusted to living on one meal a day. Many have the wrong notion that overeating conduces to a strong and healthy body; but the fact is that people suffer more physical ailments by overeating than by eating less. It is a good policy to reduce the intake of food after the age of forty to almost half the quantity one was used to eating earlier—of course this should be done gradually. It must also be remembered that the quantity of food required by each individual varies and one

must take food according to one's constitution.

The quality of food also must be taken into consideration. Rich, spicy, fried, and oily food, which is difficult to digest, must be avoided. The Gita describes in brief the three types of foods: sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic. An aspirant must avoid tamasic and rajasic food and take only a sattvic diet.

While it is important to follow general health rules to keep the body healthy and free from disease, it is equally important not to become too fastidious about them. This is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother did not encourage the practice of hatha yoga. We must not become overly body-conscious. It is better to overlook minor bodily inconveniences, which, in any way, will never leave us. One of the signs of a healthy body is that we are not conscious of it—mind does not go to it. One of the purposes of spiritual practice is to reduce body-consciousness. Unfortunately, in many spiritual aspirants, body-consciousness increases with time and they become fastidious about minor aches and inconveniences.

Giving undue importance to minor aches and pains, thinking of them all the time, and going on taking medicines throughout the day is a mental disease called hypochondria. This is the reason why Acharya Shankar denounces persons who give excessive importance to the body: 'Whoever seeks to realize the Self by devoting himself to the nourishment of the body proceeds to cross a river by catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log of wood.'⁴ When the elephant of spiritual ecstasy enters the thatched hut of the body, it shatters it to pieces, says Sri Ramakrishna. This happened to most of the great saints, even though their physical bodies were strong.

Mental Strength

Great saints and advanced sojourners on the spiritual path have marked mental strength, which is far more important than physical strength. They are able to withstand physical rigour, stress, and strain, and are able to control their minds on account of tremendous tolerance, great determination, and

unending patience. There is the story of a Jain saint who renounced the world at the age of fifteen. He hailed from an aristocratic family and was totally unaccustomed to life's rigours. In his parental home servants did everything. So on the first day of his novitiate as a wandering Jain monk he could not walk three or four miles, and having walked barefoot developed blisters on his feet. His shoulder also turned sore due to the friction of a small bundle of clothes. Initially senior monks had to serve him. But he refused to go back to the world, holding on with great determination against all odds, and finally rising to become the head of his sangha.

A strong will is indeed the most important strength of a spiritual aspirant; with its help the aspirant is able to overcome all difficulties. The spiritual path is like a razor's edge; without a strong will, ready and capable of surmounting all difficulties, no one can progress in the spiritual path. In fact, a strong will is needed for success even in secular fields. When it is directed towards a spiritual goal, it leads to the highest attainment. This will-power increases by the practice of austerities, adherence to vows, observance of rules and regulations, and other similar disciplines. Even if we fail to control our restless mind and cannot practise high ethical values like truth, non-violence, or abstinence to perfection, we must not lose heart and must try repeatedly to master them. Swami Brahmananda used to say that when a newborn calf tries to stand on its feet, it falls down; in spite of falling repeatedly, it continues with its efforts to rise, and ultimately succeeds.

Spiritual life is full of difficulties, but these very difficulties prove to be great blessings in disguise. In grappling with them the aspirant's will-power increases. These obstacles are like progressively harder exercises and tests presented by the master to make his disciple a better and stronger wrestler. Hence, an aspirant must never shy away from them; rather, they should be gladly welcomed. Some people, of their own accord, choose situations full of difficulties in order to habituate their mind to constant struggle and also to create opportunities for using their will-power. St John of the Cross says:

Always seek for preference;
Not the easiest but the hardest;
Not the most charming but the most boring;
Not what pleases but what repels;
Not what consoles but rather what afflicts;
Not what saves trouble but what gives us trouble;
Not the most but the least;
Not the highest and the most precious but the
lowest and most despised;
Not the desire of something but the non-desire;
Do not seek what is better in things but what is
worse.⁵

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is another sign of mental strength. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly emphasizes the need to acquire self-confidence: 'In you is all power. Summon up your all-powerful nature, O mighty one, and this whole universe will lie at your feet.'⁶ Without such strong self-confidence no progress is possible. First of all there must be a tremendous confidence in one's own infinite potentialities. Together with this one must hold on to the spiritual ideal with great tenacity. Many aspirants, after a few failures, lose self-confidence and conclude that the spiritual ideal is not for them and that they are not competent enough to struggle for and achieve it.

Swami Vivekananda says that one must take up one ideal and hold on to it till the end of one's life. One may choose to serve the motherland; another may take up truth, or non-violence, or other virtues as ideals. But a course once decided upon must not be relinquished. Nowadays there is a bombardment of information and a great confusion about values. Hundreds of ideals are constantly being shot at our minds and under their influence there is every chance of changing ideals frequently. Many spiritual aspirants begin on their path with great zeal, but after some time that original zeal subsides and they accept defeat against the difficulties. Swamiji repeatedly asks us to have patience and perseverance. While facing the multiple problems of daily life, while grappling with the particular difficulties of the spiritual path, while living in the midst of mutually conflicting thought currents, we must doggedly

hold on to the decisions we have taken and perform our daily practices steadily, without break.

Fearlessness is yet another sign of mental strength. According to Swamiji, fear alone is the cause of our wrongdoings, and fear comes due to the ignorance of our real divine nature. The Upanishads state that the sense of duality, of being separate from others, is the root cause of all fear. Yajnavalkya congratulated King Janaka for attaining the non-dual state, which had made him *abhaya*, fearless. Swamiji believed that the central theme of the Upanishads is *abhih*, fearlessness. And this fearlessness extolled in the Upanishads is achieved only through Self-realization. However, to the extent that one feels the light of the Atman in oneself and in others, to that extent a person becomes fearless.

Sri Ramakrishna also mentions fearlessness as a practice for the spiritual aspirant: '*Lajja, ghrina, bhay, tin thakte nay*; shame, aversion, and fear—one cannot attain the spiritual goal as long as one has these three.' Fear appears in various ways. The fear of the future, of not being able to reach the goal, for instance, does not allow lukewarm aspirants to proceed far on the spiritual path. The inevitable uncertainty of the future scares them. Most of these fears are either imaginary or due to mistaken or hazy ideas about the goal and the path. Others are afraid of people's opinions: 'What will others say if I visit an ashrama and try to lead a religious life? They might taunt me.' Sri Ramakrishna would encourage his devotees to sing aloud the name of God and dance in the company of devotees, leaving aside all reservations and caring nothing for others' criticism. Let others say what they like, you must chant the name of God, relinquishing all fear and shame; that was Sri Ramakrishna's advice.

Strong body-consciousness is one of the main causes of fear. As long as one considers oneself a body or is too much attached to it, fear of disease, old age, and death will persist. Conversely, as long as one has fear of death, so long will body-consciousness or identification with the body remain. Hence, one of the means of getting over one's attachment to the body is to relinquish the fear of death.

Fear of death is the fear of the unknown, since we have not yet experienced it in this body. It has to be brought, somehow or other, within the scope of our experience, if we are to conquer it. This can be done by discrimination or by observing and pondering on the death of others. Ramana Maharshi overcame death by strongly visualizing it in his own being. If one does not have too strong a hankering for physical enjoyments, is not excessively attached to sense-objects, and has borne enough physical and mental sufferings in life, one is less liable to have fear of death, though this is not a hard and fast rule.

The spiritual journey is as much an adventure as mountaineering or deep-sea diving. There is no place for fear in this path. At the same time, one must not be over-confident or over-estimate one's spiritual strength and ability, nor undertake any task which is beyond one's strength. Bhagavan Shiva could swallow and digest poison; we cannot. Over-confident people are bound to slip. But it is also true that one who is always afraid of falling falls often. To assess one's strengths and weaknesses correctly and to practise prudence and carefulness is as important as courage and fearlessness.

Forbearance and Non-violence

According to Swami Vivekananda, forbearance and non-violence are signs of strength. To forbear even while one has the power to retaliate is a mark of greater strength. Swamiji illustrates this point by giving the example of a mosquito that sat on the horn of a bull and later apologized for bothering him. The bull said to the mosquito that he could sit on his body with his whole family for as long as he liked. Similarly, a strong person is able to forbear the sufferings caused by others without any mental reaction. To retaliate is a sign not of strength but of mean-mindedness. 'Tit for tat', 'might is right' are laws for the common masses. To resist evil and injustice by force or war may be necessary at times, but there are higher solutions too. And yet, weakness and helplessness must not be mistaken for forbearance.

There are various expressions of power. Accord-

ing to the Puranas, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are considered the gods of creation, preservation, and destruction—activities requiring rajasic, sattavic, and tamasic powers respectively. Creation and destruction, the latter in particular, are more spectacular than preservation. However, preservation and protection involve no less power and energy. A mother forbears all the pranks of her child—its weeping, crying, and even physical blows—with infinite patience and love. If she were to beat her child for every little mischief, the child would never grow. Similar is the attitude of the forbearing person.

This, of course, does not mean that the non-violent person must always meekly forbear all injustice and evil. A truly non-violent person has such spiritual strength that people just do not dare to behave wrongly in his presence. One of the signs of inner strength is that others are able to feel the force of this integrity and moral vigour. If we are weak, there is every chance of unscrupulous people taking undue advantage of us. Therefore, we must be so strong that others feel our strength instinctively and desist from harming us. We must protect ourselves with dignity and fortitude.

'The strength of a chain is assessed by its weakest link.' If one or two links are weak, though others are all strong, the whole chain would be considered weak. Similarly, there must not be even one weak link in a spiritual aspirant's character. In spite of possessing a number of noble qualities, one or two moral weaknesses or evil tendencies might be the cause of a painful downfall. Hence, with great watchfulness, care, and sustained effort, one must find out one's weaknesses and remove them altogether.

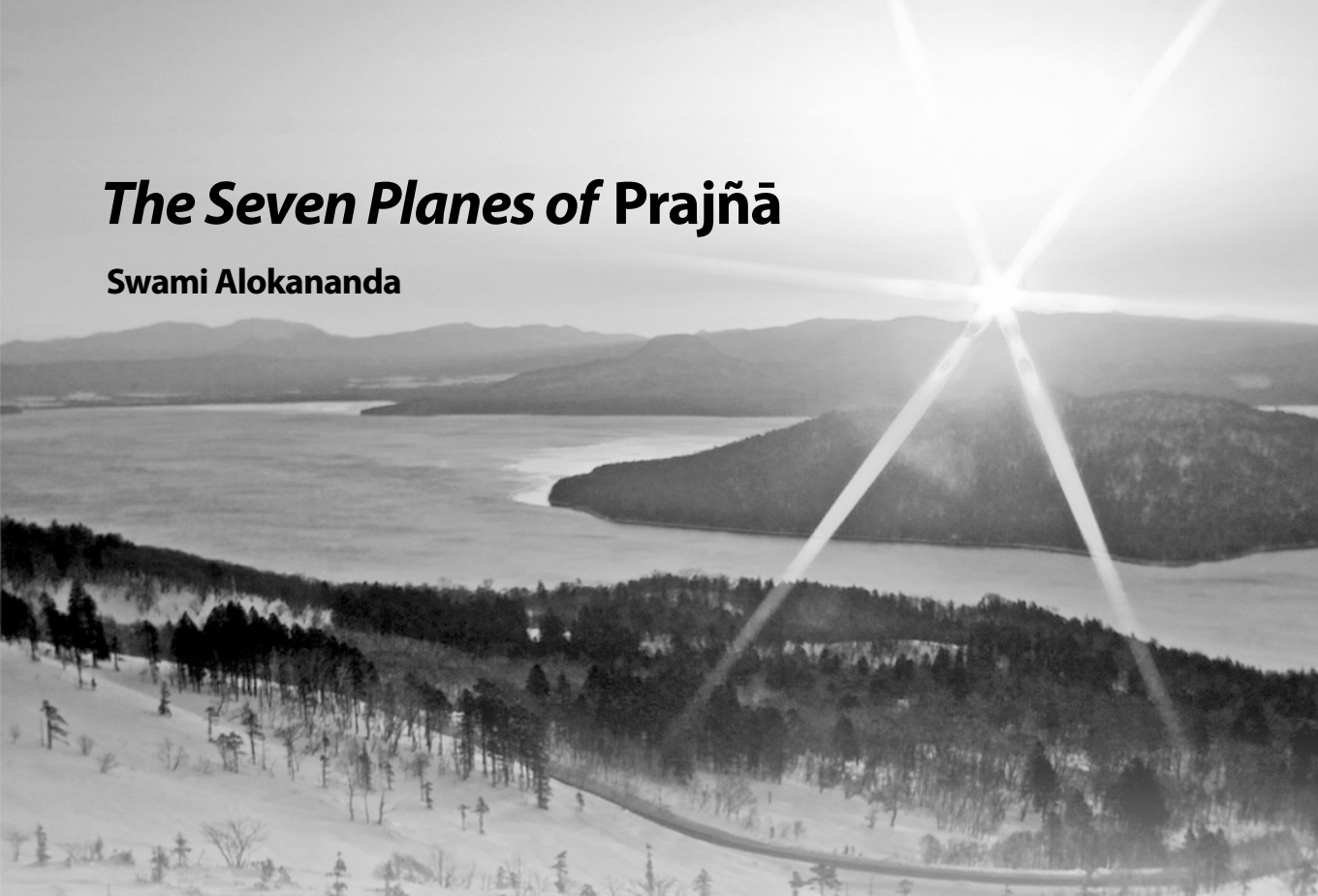


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3. *Bhagavadgita*, 6.16-17.
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The Seven Planes of Prajñā

Swami Alokanda



BRAHMAN is Satchidananda—existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute—eternal, unchanging, without beginning or end, the plenitude of knowledge, devoid of all activity, transcending all objective categories. Through its omnipotence, Shakti, it willed its own objective manifestation. The indivisible ocean of consciousness was thrown into waves. Though every wave is part of the ocean, yet each is seen as a separate independent entity. In like manner, the individual soul, jiva—a wave in the limitless ocean of non-dual Satchidananda—conceives itself as independent out of ignorance, *ajñāna* or *avidyā*, becomes confined to the limited sphere of knowledge, and is overcome by egotism. Release from this *avidyā* alone can bring fulfillment in life. Only then is the jiva able to transcend the cycle of birth and death by being established in its own true Self. The Indian spiritual tradition has detailed different spiritual practices or sadhanas for practitioners of diverse temperaments to be established in the Self.

We shall be taking a very brief look at the process of reaching the farthest reaches of insight, *prajñā*, as described by Maharshi Patanjali.

Ayurveda conceives the practice of the art of healing in terms of disease, its cause, health, and the means to health. The system of yoga, which aims at elimination of existential ills, also outlines its method under four heads: *heya*, the ill that has to be eliminated; *heya-hetu*, the cause of the ill; *hāna*, freedom from the ill; and *hānopāya*, the means to this freedom. Existence, characterized by sorrow, is itself the ill.¹ The union between the Purusha, the seer, and the mind or intellect, *buddhi*, the seen, is the cause of the ill.² Permanent elimination of this attachment or ‘wrong identification’ is freedom,³ and *viveka-khyāti*, discriminative knowledge devoid of all falsity, is the means to this freedom.⁴

That all worldly objects are sources of pain is a central dictum in yoga. Even apparently pleasurable objects lead to painful consequences. The identification of the Purusha with the mind is the source of

the three kind of sorrows: *ādhyātmika*, physical and psychological; *ādhibhautika*, caused by other beings; and *ādhidaiivika*, the natural calamities. Though eternally pure and unattached, the Purusha identifies itself with the mind or *buddhi* due to *ajñāna*. Just as a loving mother actually starts feeling the pain of her sick child and even thinks of herself as ill due to her attachment to the child, the Purusha too considers itself afflicted by the ills of the mind. So the sadhaka has to break this identification of the seer with the seen. The identification is the result of a lack of discrimination between the true identities of the seer and the seen. Hence the sadhaka has to cultivate discriminative knowledge, *viveka-khyāti*, about the seer and the seen through the practice of the eight-limbed yoga. When this *viveka-khyāti* remains unimpeded by nescience or false knowledge the jiva attains *prajñā*, discriminative insight.

In his *Yoga Sutra* Maharshi Patanjali mentions several levels of *prajñā*, the ultimate discriminative insight derived from *viveka-khyāti*: ‘*Tasya saptadhā prānta-bhūmiḥ prajñā*; to that person come seven forms of discriminative insight’ (2.27).

The first plane of *prajñā* marks the ultimacy of the sadhaka’s knowledge. Earlier, the sadhaka had something to know about the ills that he or she was trying to forsake. Now that need is extinguished. In the next stage the renunciant is established in the conviction that nothing further remains to be renounced. On reaching the third plane the sadhaka realizes that he or she has successfully accessed all the means to this detachment; nothing more remains to be acquired. When on the fourth plane, the sadhaka is convinced that having attained *viveka-khyāti* through *samprajñāta samādhi* he or she has reached the culmination of the practices for liberation and that nothing more remains to be done.

These four forms of *prajñā* constitute *kārya-vimukti*, liberation from action. They involve active practice. The next three planes involve dissolution of the *citta*, mindstuff, and together constitute *citta-vimukti*. As the yogi remains established in *para-vairāgya*, supreme renunciation, these three planes of *prajñā* unfold of their own accord.

The fifth form of *prajñā* brings with it the realization that the mind, having fulfilled its function, has become quiescent, and that sorrows born of *vāsanās*, desires and impulses, have come to an end. With the advent of the sixth discriminative insight the mindstuff, derived from the three *guṇas*, starts disintegrating irreversibly: ‘like boulders dislodged from the top of a hill, the mind, along with its constituents, rushes unstoppably into dissolution—merger in its cause, Prakriti’. On the final plane the Purusha is restored to its own pristine state, devoid of all contact with the mind and its functions which have now undergone total dissolution.

The first plane marks the end of all *jijñāsā*, desire for knowing; the second of *jihāsā*, desire for giving up; the third of *prepsā*, wish to obtain; and the fourth of *cikīrṣā*, wish to do. The next three planes are characterized by the successive elimination of *duḥkha*, *bhaya*, and *vikalpa*—sorrow, fear, and finally all mental modifications.

In the Vedantic text *Yogavasishtha*, the sage Vashishtha also speaks of seven stages of yoga:

*Jñāna-bhūmiḥ śubhecchākhyā
prathamā samudāhṛtā;
Vicāraṇā dvitīyā syāt
trītyā tanumānasā.
Sattvāpattiś-caturthī syāt
tato’samsakti-nāmikā;
Padārthābhāvinī ṣaṣṭhī
saptamī turyagā smṛtā.*

The first stage of knowledge is called ‘goodwill’, the second is termed ‘discrimination’, and the third ‘attenuated mind’. The fourth stage is ‘self-realization’, the fifth is named ‘detachment’, the sixth is the ‘objectless’, and the seventh the ‘transcendent’.⁵

Renunciation of worldly attachments and activities through discrimination and cultivation of traits like restraint of the senses and the mind, abstinence from sensual thought, forbearance, faith, and meditation out of an intense desire for liberation constitute the first plane, Shubheccha. Formally approaching a guru and undertaking study of and reflection on Vedantic dicta under his or her

guidance is the second stage, Vicharana. The mental capacity to apprehend subtle spiritual truths, developed through practice of contemplation on Vedantic truths, *nididhyāsana*, marks the third plane, Tanumanasa. The fourth plane, Sattvapatti, is characterized by the non-dual realization of the oneness of Atman and Brahman, resulting from *śravaṇa*—instruction on Vedantic *mahāvākyas*, comprehensive unitary statements, by a competent teacher. When the mind practising *nirodha*, restraint, moves beyond objective or *savikalpaka* samadhi to *nirvikalpaka samadhi*, an objectless state, then it is said to have reached the fifth plane, termed Asamsakti. The permanent and steady establishment in this state born of sustained effort on the previous planes is termed Padarthabhavini, the sixth plane. When the yogi is so established in Brahman, so soaked in the bliss of samadhi as never to return to a lower plane, either of one's own accord or through others' efforts, then that yogi is on the ultimate plane, Turyaga.

The fourth plane signals Self-realization, the first three being means to it. The last three planes are but different states of *jīvanmukti*, freedom while living:

*Caturthī-bhūmikā jñānam
tisraḥ syuḥ sādhanam purā;
Jīvanmukter-avasthāstu
parās-tisraḥ prakīrtitāḥ.*

Yogis happening to die while on any of the first three planes would have to be born again. They are not liberated because they are yet to attain jñana, though they have renounced karma. It is only those who are on the fourth or higher planes that are assured of *videha-kaivalya*, liberation from future embodiment.

The Bhagavata has this to say about the external behaviour of the *jīvanmukta* yogi:

*Deham ca naśvaram-avasthitam-utthitam vā
siddho na paśyati yato'dhyagamat svarūpam;
Daivādapetam-uta daiva-vaśād-upetaṁ
vāso yathā parikṛtaṁ madirā-madāndhabḥ.*

This person of realization is not aware of the body that was an aid to realization—unconcerned if it remains by virtue of *prārabdha*, past actions that have started fruiting—just as a person inebriated with wine is unaware if his cloth is still on.⁶

*Deho'api daiva-vaśagaḥ khalu karma yāvat
svārambhakaṁ pratisamīkṣata eva sāsubḥ;
Tam saprapaṇcam-adhirūḍha-samādhi-yogaḥ
svāpnam punar-na bhajate pratibuddha-vastubḥ.*

As long as the *prārabdha* karma that lead to the present embodiment lasts, the body (of the yogi of realization) will remain, together with the *prāṇas*, but the knowing one, who has attained the state of samadhi and realized the Truth, is no more attached to the body and its appurtenances, viewing them as (equivalent to) dream objects (11.13.37).

About the liberated person who has transcended all desires, the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: 'Tad-yathāhinirivayanī valmike mṛtā pratyastā śayita evam-evedaṁ śarīraṁ śete athāyam-aśarīro'mṛtaḥ prāṇo brahmaiva teja eva; just as the lifeless slough of a snake is cast off and lies in the anthill, so does this body lie—then the self becomes disembodied and immortal, (becomes) the Prana (Supreme Self), Brahman, the Light.'⁷ In his commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* Swami Vivekananda has described this state thus: 'The Yogi (having reached this state) will become peaceful and calm, never to feel any more pain, never to be again deluded, never to be touched by misery. He will know he is ever blessed, ever perfect, almighty.'⁸



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3. 'Tad-abhāvāt saṁyogābhāvo hānam tad-dṛśeḥ kaivalyam' (2.25).
4. 'Viveka-khyātir-aviplavā hānopāyah' (2.26).
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Yoga for Evolution of Human Consciousness

Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaiyer

YOGA has remained a topic of widespread interest in recent decades. To many it means physical fitness or psychic well-being. This of course is not untrue. But such proponents of yoga are often oblivious of the deeper and more vital significance of yoga: the evolution of human consciousness. Yoga, as philosophy and practice, is to be approached in this sense—as the integral science of evolution of human consciousness—if one wishes to explore the deeper dimensions of one's being.

The term 'yoga' signifies the highest functional integration of the psychosomatic and spiritual dimensions of the human personality, ensuring not only the health of the body but also the functional clarity of the senses, purity of mind, and transparent awareness of the soul. 'Yoga' is derived from the root *yuj*, meaning 'to unite'; it thus signifies the union of individual consciousness, the self, with cosmic consciousness.¹ This can only be achieved through a progressive evolution of human consciousness. This evolution or unfolding of consciousness is taking place everywhere in the universe. For a better understanding of this process one can view it in terms of personal yoga, for the whole of evolution is unitary in its essence. The laws of evolution of consciousness in the universe are exactly the same as the laws of yoga. As Annie Besant observes: 'Whether you are thinking of the unfolding of consciousness in the universe, or in the human race, or in the individual, you can study the laws of the whole, and in Yoga you learn to apply those same laws to your own consciousness rationally and definitely.'² Practical yoga may thus also be viewed as the rational application of the laws of evolution of consciousness to one's own self.

Consciousness and Its States

To understand the process of evolution of consciousness it is necessary to consider the yogic view of the human being. Yoga takes the human being as a unit of consciousness, Purusha, sheathed in a set of envelopes, derived from insentient material Prakriti.³ There are different opinions among philosophers and psychologists regarding the nature of consciousness. In the context of yoga it can be simply defined as 'the state of dynamic awareness'.⁴ Awareness may be situated at different levels: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, vital, and gross. Change of state within itself is a fundamental characteristic of consciousness. We cannot distinguish states of consciousness from consciousness itself, for consciousness is not something separate from the states in which it manifests; it exists in them, passes away with their passing, and remains submerged when they are submerged. Between matter and consciousness there is a definite relationship: a change in consciousness—change in the state of consciousness, not a change of place—that reflects a concomitant change in the vibration or configuration of matter, and vice versa. There seems to exist a specific correlation between material configuration and the particular aspect of consciousness which it can give expression to.⁵ Every change in the state of consciousness is related to alterations in the vibrations of its material vehicle. This invariable relationship holds good between the self—which is pure consciousness—and its material sheaths. These correspondences are utilized in raja yoga and hatha yoga. Raja yoga seeks to control changes in consciousness, and by this means rule the material vehicles. Hatha yoga aims at controlling the vibrations of matter, and by this control evoke the desired changes in consciousness.

According to yoga our states of consciousness can be analysed in two parts: a permanent and a changing.⁶ The changing part is that which is constantly varying, reflecting the constant change in the content of awareness. The permanent part is that pure light of intelligence by virtue of which we have the notion of self reflected in our consciousness. As this self persists through all the varying changes in our objective consciousness, it is inferred that the light which thus shines in our consciousness is unchangeable. Our mind constantly undergoes innumerable modifications, termed *citta-vṛttis*, but the notion of self is the only thing permanent amidst all these changes. It is the self which imparts consciousness to the material aspects of our knowledge. All our mental concepts originate from our perception of material objects. These concepts are made conscious and intelligent by the reflection of the Purusha, the self. Thereby arises the seeming identity of the Purusha and the mind, and our phenomenal intelligent self is partially a material reality, arising out of the interaction between spirit and matter. But the Purusha, the true seer—the pure intelligence, the free, the eternal—remains all the while beyond any touch of the impurities of the mind. The Purusha is, in fact, altogether different from the mind. The former is pure intelligence and absolutely free, while the latter is non-intelligent and subordinate to the Purusha, whose quest for enjoyment and release are solely responsible for the mind's movements.

In the 'Vibhūti Pada' of the *Yoga Sutra* Patanjali says, '*Sattva-puruṣayor śuddhi-sāmye kaivalyam-iti*'; liberation, *kaivalya*, is attained when there is equality of purity between the Purusha and the mind.⁷ The mind can be made so pure as to reflect the Purusha in its pristine nature. When the mind is concentrated and its workings cease, the Purusha or pure consciousness shines in all its effulgence. This is the ultimate aim of yoga. Patanjali defines yoga accordingly: '*Yogas-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*'; yoga is restraining the mind-stuff from taking various forms' (1.2).

Citta and Its States

Citta means 'the three internal organs of Sankhya—buddhi or intellect, ahaṁkāra or ego, and manas or mind'.⁸ Vyasa, in his commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*, describes five levels of mental life, *citta-bhūmis*: (i) *kṣipta*, wandering; (ii) *mūḍha*, torpid or lethargic; (iii) *vikṣipta*, distracted; (iv) *ekāgra*, one-pointed; and (v) *niruddha*, arrested. The *kṣipta citta* is characterized as wandering, because it is continuously moved by *rajas*. A person moved by *rajas* is a slave to passion. The *mūḍha citta*, on the other hand, is enslaved by *tamas*. Marked by ignorance and lethargy, it lacks discrimination and remains inert or chooses the wrong course when it is moved. It is also easily overcome by such passions as anger and lust. The *vikṣipta citta* has attained some measure of self-control and can exercise reason to avoid painful actions and choose pleasurable ones instead. These three minds can never attain the contemplative concentration required for *kaivalya*. The *ekāgra citta* is a concentrated mind with true knowledge of the nature of reality. The *niruddha citta* is the restrained mind in which all mental states are arrested. This leads to *kaivalya*, separation of the Purusha from the mind—the aim of yoga.

Until the mind attains the *niruddha* state, the self remains associated with the particular *vṛttis*, modifications of the mind, which happen to occupy the field of consciousness at any given moment. Patanjali holds that *vṛttis* are five in number and can be classified in two ways, *vṛttayah pancatayyah kṣiṣṭā akṣiṣṭāḥ*; there are five classes of mental modifications, (some) painful and (others) not painful.⁹ The five types of *vṛttis* include '*pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtayah*'; right knowledge, wrong knowledge, imagination or fancy, sleep, and memory' (1.6).¹⁰ Our mental life consists of a great variety of images, but all of these can be classified under the above five heads. Based on their relation to feelings, Patanjali further classifies the *vṛttis* as either *kṣiṣṭā*, painful, or *akṣiṣṭā*, not painful.¹¹ According to the theory of *kleśas*—pain-bearing obstructions—upon which the yogic philosophy is based, all experiences that generate a reaction,

whether painful or pleasurable, are causes of bondage of the self and hence, in the ultimate analysis, are painful. Only when *vyrttis*, experiences, are not linked to *kleśas*, emotional reactions, can they be termed *akliṣṭā*, not painful.

Patanjali lists two means to unlink *vyrttis* from *kleśas*: *abhyāsa*, persistent practice, and *vairāgya*, non-attachment. In the context of Patanjali's yoga, *abhyāsa* comprehends all the component parts of *aṣṭāṅga yoga*, eightfold practice. In its essence it is the constant struggle to keep the mind steady and the *vyrttis* under check, *tatra sthitau yatno'bhyaśa*.¹² It is worth noting that, except in the ultimate stages, *abhyāsa* involves holding the mind in one state and not a complete absence of all *vyrttis*. Therefore, true practice of yoga involves setting the mind on one principle at any given time. *Abhyāsa*, to be effective, must be accompanied by *vairāgya*, desirelessness, a state in which the mind is indifferent to all kinds of pleasures and pains, 'that effect which comes to those who have given up their thirst after objects, either seen or heard, and which wills to control the objects'.¹³

By constant *abhyāsa* and cultivation of *vairāgya* there awakens a new kind of consciousness which is called *pratyak-cetana*. *Cetanā*, consciousness, may be viewed as being directed in two diametrically opposite directions: *pratyak*, inward, and *parāk*, outward. Normal human consciousness is immersed in the outer world, occupied all the time with a number of images continuously passing through the field of consciousness. This outward turn of consciousness is the result of *vikṣepa*, the outward projection of the lower mind of what is present within it. The whole aim of yoga consists in withdrawing the consciousness from without and turning it within, for the ultimate mystery of life is hidden in the very heart, the very centre of our being. If we are to speak in Vedantic terms, this inward turn is aided by, and in turn augments the manifestation of, the strength of the Atman, the illumination of the *buddhi*, and the knowledge of the higher purified mind which provides the necessary momentum needed for treading the path of

yoga. The contact with the Purusha, which is none other than the *pratyak-cetana*, becomes immediate only in samadhi, when consciousness, after leaving the external vehicles one after another, becomes centred in itself. In practical terms, as one dives deep into the layers of this stream of consciousness, one gradually becomes awakened and self-aware, and feels increasingly free within.

Mental Control and Transformation

But to attain to the state of *pratyak-cetana* requires great mental effort; it is not within easy reach of ordinary persons whose minds are swayed by worldly enjoyments. Such aspirants must pass through the discipline of the eight *yogāṅgas*, limbs of yoga, which help steady and quieten the body-mind complex so that *jñāna-dīpti*, the lustre of knowledge, is revealed unhindered. The edifice of yoga is based on the first two *yogāṅgas*: *yama*, restraints, and *niyama*, observances. *Ahiṃsā*, non-violence, *satya*, truth, *asteya*, non-stealing, *brahmacarya*, celibacy, and *aparigraha*, non-possession, comprise *yama*. *Niyama* includes *śauca*, cleanliness, *santoṣa*, contentment, *tapas*, penance, *svādhyāya*, scriptural study and *japa*, and *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, surrender to God. The intermediate *yogāṅgas*—*āsana*, steady posture, *prāṇāyāma*, regulation of breath and the related life-energies, and *pratyāhāra*, withdrawal of senses and abstraction of thought—lead to the final stages of yoga: *dhāraṇā*, concentration, *dhyana*, meditation, and *samadhi*, contemplative absorption.

The first five *yogāṅgas* are preparatory disciplines for *dhāraṇā*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*, which together constitute yoga proper: *Trayam-antarāṅgam pūrvebhyaḥ*.¹⁴ The complete process beginning with *dhāraṇā* and ending in *samadhi* is called *saṁnyama*. The practical mastery of this technique takes one to the deepest layers of consciousness and opens up vistas of knowledge inaccessible to ordinary consciousness by means of *prajñāloka*, light of intuition. It also brings supernatural powers known as *siddhis*.

In the 'Vibhuti Pada' section of the *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali discusses three fundamental types of

mental transformations involved in the practice of higher yoga. These three transformations or *pariṇāmas* are: (i) *samādhi pariṇāma*, (ii) *ekāgratā pariṇāma*, and (iii) *nirodha pariṇāma*. In the progressive process of self-realization through samadhi, the mind passes from one stage to another through these three *pariṇāmas*, which are sequentially related to one another, as consciousness withdraws step by step into its own nature, the Purusha.

As soon as control of the mind is begun, *nirodha* comes into play. The term *nirodha* means both restraint and suppression. The ultimate *nirodha* is seen in *asamprajñāta samādhi*, marked by suppression of all *vṛttis*. This is achieved by prolongation of the momentary unmodified state of mind which intervenes between two successive *vṛttis*. The object of *nirodha pariṇāma* is to produce at will this unmodified state for an indefinite duration of time. But for achieving complete *nirodha* the mind has to pass through *samādhi* and *ekāgratā pariṇāmas*. *Samādhi pariṇāma* does not involve actual samadhi; it is the first significant transformation leading to samadhi. Its essential nature is to replace the series of objects which enter the mind by one chosen object, the seed of samadhi: ‘*Sarvārthataikāgratayoh kṣayodayau cittasya samādhi-pariṇāmah*’ (3.11). The consummation of *samādhi pariṇāma* is *ekāgratā pariṇāma*. Here, only one object of knowledge, *pratyaya*—the same seed of *samādhi pariṇāma*—keeps rising repeatedly in the field of consciousness to the exclusion of all other *pratyayas*: ‘*Śāntoditau tulya-pratyayau cittasyaikāgratā-pariṇāmah*’ (3.12). This gives the impression that a single unchanging *pratyaya* is occupying the mental field. The suppression of the *pratyaya* of *ekāgratā pariṇāma* by *nirodha* leads to *asamprajñāta samādhi*. Though this state is devoid of *vṛttis*, the mind remains intensely active. The samskaras of *prajñā*, illuminative insight, are still present in the mind, attempting to break through to the conscious level. The samskaras of *nirodha* prevent them from surfacing. This process of suppression of *prajñā samskāras* by *nirodha samskāras* is termed *nirodha pariṇāma*: ‘*Vyutthāna-nirodha-samskārayor-abhibhava-prādurbhāvau*

nirodha-kṣaṇa-cittānvyayo nirodha-pariṇāmah’ (3.9). Only when the *pratyayas* of even the *ānandamaya* plane are suppressed does the consciousness that is the Purusha reveal itself fully.¹⁵ This is transcendent consciousness, of which our mundane consciousness is but a partial and limited manifestation. At each stage of progress the yogi finds that the new consciousness which dawns within oneself is more vital and glorious than the preceding one. Thus one seems to be progressively uncovering a tremendous reality hidden within the deepest recesses of one’s being. Finally, when *nirodha* is fully established and all other samskaras totally overwhelmed, one is established in the state of *kaivalya*, the ultimate end of yoga as described by Patanjali: *kaivalyam svarūpa-pratiṣṭhā vā citi-śakter-iti*; in other words, *kaivalya* is the establishment of the power of knowledge in its own nature’ (4.34). In this state the Purusha is established in its real nature, its real individuality, which is pure consciousness—the divine or cosmic consciousness, the innermost dimension of the human being. ☪

Notes and References

1. In his *Yoga Sutra*, however, Patanjali uses ‘yoga’ to mean concentration or samadhi, largely repudiating the connotation of union.
2. Annie Besant, *Introduction to Yoga* (Chennai: Theosophical Publishing, 2002), 34.
3. According to the Upanishadic concept, to which yoga would not object, the human being is essentially the pure Self, Atman. And five sheaths, *pañca-kōśas* cover this Atman: (i) *annamaya*, physical; (ii) *prāṇamaya*, vital; (iii) *manomaya*, mental; (iv) *vijñānamaya*, intellectual; and (v) *ānandamaya*, blissful.
4. M K Kaw, *The Science of Spirituality* (New Delhi: D K Printworld, 1983), 19. Awareness at the spiritual level is super-consciousness; at the intellectual level, conscious and sub-conscious; and at the gross level, unconscious.
5. *Introduction to Yoga*, 6.
6. Surendranath Dasgupta, *Yoga: As Philosophy and Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 20.
7. *Yoga Sutra*, 3.56.
8. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 171.
9. *Yoga Sutra*, 1.5.

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Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo

Dr K V Raghupathi

INDIA is predominantly a spiritual country with its own distinctive culture. It has given birth to hundreds of sages, saints, and philosophers who have worked to restore and renew her rich spiritual heritage periodically. This has ensured the continuity of spiritual tradition from Vedic times, a tradition that is vibrant even today despite external onslaughts and internal upheavals. Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo represent two ends of this unbroken and unceasing spiritual tradition.

Considered an incarnation of the mythical serpent king Ananta, who supports the earth, Patanjali is believed to have lived two thousand years ago. He was born to put the house of yoga in order and to systematize it for ease of comprehension and access. Hence if Shiva is the first yogi, Patanjali is next to him among yogis of the highest order. The system propounded by him is known as *ashtanga yoga*, the eight-limbed yoga comprising of *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*.

Sri Aurobindo belongs to modern times. He was a poet, philosopher, freedom fighter, nationalist, and above all a rishi and yogi in the Vedic tradition. Born on 15 August 1872, he had fourteen years of vigorous English education at St Paul's School in London and King's College, Cambridge. His life after return to India in 1892 underwent several twists and turns. After working in various administrative and professional posts in Baroda and Calcutta, including that of a teacher at Maharaja's College, he plunged into revolutionary nationalist politics, advocating extremist methods to free India from British rule. In 1908, while in the Alipore jail for his alleged involvement in the Alipore bomb case, he had several mystical experiences which drastically transformed him into a yogi. Several

years earlier he had started practising yoga under the instruction of Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, but it was only in Alipore that he realized his true destiny and finally abandoned his political and revolutionary literary activity. In 1910, soon after his acquittal, he secretly sailed for Pondicherry, his final home for practising intense yogic sadhana. It was there that he became a silent but spiritually dynamic personality, fully focused on his new path which resulted in a new vision, a new philosophy, a new religious outlook, and a new experience. This transformation led him to proclaim that the advent of the Supramental on earth was inevitable. Bringing the supramental consciousness and power down to earth was Sri Aurobindo's central work. He explained this process as well as his yogic experiences in his writings, which run into several thousand pages. These include *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, and *The Record of Yoga*.

Integral Yoga and the Physical Being

Although both Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo expound on yoga, they seem to differ on several counts. If Patanjali's is *ashtanga yoga*, Sri Aurobindo's system could be termed *panchanga yoga*, the five-limbed yoga, which includes the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic, and the spiritual aspects of the human being. Sri Aurobindo called it *purna yoga* or 'integral yoga'. To understand his philosophy properly one needs to view the human being in its five-fold nature and see how each aspect leads to the other, characterized by greater perfection, and finally to the Supreme. For one to be whole one must walk these five principal steps relating to the five spheres of life. Usually these aspects of being are also phases of one's spiritual life, succeed-

ing each other in chronological order and marking the growth and perfection of the individual. Each of these aspects has its own laws of growth, perfection, and fulfilment. Sri Aurobindo says:

When we reach this degree of perfection which is our goal, we shall perceive that the truth we seek is made up of four major aspects: Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. These four attributes of the Truth will express themselves spontaneously in our being. The psychic will be the vehicle of true and pure love, the mind will be the vehicle of infallible knowledge, the vital will manifest an invincible power and strength, and the body will be the expression of a perfect beauty and a perfect harmony.¹

The physical is as important as the mental. Sri Aurobindo's yoga begins with the physical, whereas Patanjali's begins with character-building for which he prescribes the five *yamas*, major moral precepts, and five *niyamas*, spiritual disciplines. For Sri Aurobindo all creation begins with matter, and life is a later development. Therefore, he gives precedence to the physical. He says: 'Perfection is the true aim of all culture. ... If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use. *Shariram khalu dharmasāadhanam*, says the old Sanskrit adage, the body is the means of fulfilment of dharma, and dharma means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out.'²

Some schools of philosophy, sects, and spiritual seekers with extreme ideologies treat the body with contempt, as something gross, inert, and unconscious—a virtually insuperable impediment to spiritual realization. But both Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo do not endorse this view. For them the body is endowed with vitality and acts as an agent of transformation. Neglecting the body or inflicting injuries upon it is antithetical to spirituality and amounts to a serious violation of natural laws. Instead, the body needs to be perfected, to be made a fit vehicle for spiritual transformation. For Sri

Aurobindo the descent of divine consciousness into the body is vital. Ultimately, it is the only medium for holding and expressing divine consciousness. So it should be trained and transformed. To facilitate this process Patanjali prescribes *pranayama*, which purifies the body by eliminating toxic substances. Though Patanjali does not prescribe elaborate *asanas* in his *Yoga Sutra*, such later yoga texts as *Hathayoga Pradipika*, *Shiva Samhita*, and *Gheranda Samhita* fulfil this purpose.

Sri Aurobindo does acknowledge that the limitations of the body are great and real, but in his opinion these are not due to its essentially unredeemable nature. When we set perfection as the goal of life, the body cannot be ignored and has to be made an integral part of the process of transformation:

A total perfection is the ultimate end which we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine Life which we wish to create here, the life of the Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe. That cannot be unless the body too undergoes a transformation. ... The body itself must reach a perfection in all that it is and does which now we can hardly conceive. It may even in the end be suffused with a light and beauty and bliss from the beyond and the life divine assume a body divine (8–11).

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy the body is taken to be the starting point of sadhana; diligent effort ought to be made to train it appropriately and make it a fit instrument for a perfect life. The body should be kept healthy by cultivating good habits of food, sleep, hygiene, and physical exercise. The objective is not only to develop physical stamina but also to command life energy at any required time by regulating the various functions of the body. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the need not only for strength but also for grace, beauty, and harmony. Beauty is the very spirit of the physical world. The ancient Greeks upheld this idea. A mastery of bodily reflexes—wonderful and quick—is desirable. Self-mastery and discipline, courage

and confidence, impartiality and fairness in dealing with others are all products of proper physical training. This physical culture has positive impact on the vital and mental being too.

Sri Aurobindo says: 'We are bound by a poor and limited physical nature, we are bound consequently by a poor and limited life-power.'³ The hatha yoga practice of *asanas* has two profound ideas: control by physical immobility and power through immobility. Sri Aurobindo observes: 'The power of physical immobility is as important in Hathayoga as the power of mental immobility in the Yoga of knowledge' (509). Hatha yoga aims at bringing about a greater poise in bearing and action and the channelling of life energy from disorder to self-mastery. So the first object of the immobility of *asanas* is to rid the body of its restlessness and force it to channel the life-energy, *prana*, instead of dissipating and squandering it. The body thus purified of its disorders and irregularities by the combined practice of *asana* and *pranayama* becomes a perfected instrument. The hatha-yogin acquires great physical power and good health and is able to maintain vigour, health, and youth unimpaired even at an advanced age. Sri Aurobindo endorses hatha yoga as he considers the body a vital element in human evolution.

The Psychic Being

The next important element in Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is the vital. It is the life-energy made up of will, action, desire, sensation, feeling, passion, and such related instincts as anger, fear, greed, and lust. The vital being is thus a vast kingdom, full of forces acting and reacting upon one another. The organization and training of these complex forces is of the utmost importance in building up one's character. Sri Aurobindo says that true knowledge comes from within, and conditions must be made suitable for it to manifest. For this, a strong, straightforward, and harmonious character has to be built by awakening the will, overcoming its weaknesses, and eliminating its defects: 'The only way for him to train himself morally is to habituate himself to

the right emotions, the noblest associations, the best mental, emotional and physical habits and the following out in right action of the fundamental impulses of his essential nature.'⁴

Patanjali prescribes *yama* and *niyama*, which help build character, as the first steps in controlling one's vital being. According to him *yama* and *niyama* together create an ethical discipline in the sadhaka, without which moving to higher planes is unthinkable and undesirable. In Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga control of the vital being is the second step. Unlike Patanjali he does not give any prescriptive principles on the lines of *yama* and *niyama*, but he does stress upon the purification of the vital being.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, apart from the building up of character, the aesthetic element is also stressed. The senses should be properly trained to attain precision and power. The student, he writes, 'should be shown, led to appreciate, taught to love beautiful, lofty, healthy and noble things, whether in Nature or in human creation. This should be a true aesthetic culture, which will protect him from degrading influences.'⁵ The Divine encompasses purity as well as beauty, and it is by the cultivation of both the ethical and the aesthetic that the heart's needs can be really fulfilled. The highest aim of art is to find the Divine through beauty. But this discovery has its laws, says Sri Aurobindo, and the first endeavour should be 'to see and depict man and Nature and life for their own sake, in their own characteristic truth and beauty; for behind these first characters lies always the beauty of the Divine in life and man and nature and it is through their just transformation that what was at first veiled by them has to be revealed.'⁶ In this way the aesthetic being will rise to its divine possibilities.

The Mental Phase

The third phase in Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is the mental. The mind, which is an obstacle to transformation, can itself be transformed in the complementary process of divine descent. Ascension is hampered by a lid and a veil which prevents humans not only from attaining the Divine but

even from knowing it. Therefore, if the mental being seeks to know the Divine, to realize it, to become it, it has first to lift this lid. For this, Sri Aurobindo prescribes surrender to the Divine that is within us and also around us—a surrender not only mental or psychological, but a total giving of the whole of our being. While speaking of the four aids to achieve perfection in yoga—*shastra*, knowledge of spiritual truths, *utsaha*, patient and persistent action; *guru*, the teacher; and *kala*, time—he introduces surrender as the surest way to find the Master who dwells within us. It is through surrender that the ego is easily obliterated.

In Patanjali's *ashtanga yoga*, *dharana*, fixing the mind on one object, can be successfully practised only after *pratyahara*, restraint of the senses, has been reasonably mastered. Our mental images are largely blurred and confused, rising as they do from a state of impurity. *Dharana* is successful only after *yama* and *niyama* eliminate the disturbances caused by uncontrolled emotions and desires, *asana* and *pranayama* control the disturbances arising from the physical body, and *pratyahara* cuts off the external world and the impressions which it produces on the mind by detaching the sense organs from the mind.

Modern psychologists aver that the mind cannot be made to remain fixed on any one object for a significant length of time. It keeps moving back and forth even when concentration of the highest degree is achieved. But according to yoga, though concentration begins with controlled movements of the mind, it can reach a state in which all movement or change stops. In this ultimate stage the mind becomes one with the essential nature of the object concentrated upon and can thus move no further. Then the consciousness confined within the prison-house of the intellect is released and is able to function at deeper levels through subtler vehicles.

In his book *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo, like Patanjali, observes that effective concentration ensures purification of the mind. He calls these two the 'feminine and masculine, passive and active [aspects], of the same status of being.'⁷ Further: 'Purity

is the condition in which concentration becomes entire, rightly effective, omnipotent' (ibid.). Without purity the complete, harmonious, and flexible concentration of one's being in right thought, right feeling, and right willing, or a secure status of spiritual experience is not possible. Therefore, the two must proceed together.

Like Patanjali, Sri Aurobindo dismisses the idea of using the term 'concentration' in a limited sense. According to him concentration has three powers: one, it helps us know not things but a single thing in its entirety; two, through concentration the whole will can be engaged for the acquisition of that which is still ungrasped, still beyond us; three, concentration can help us become whatever we choose. It also implies, in its higher reaches, renunciation, cessation, and lastly an ascent into the absolute and transcendent state of samadhi.

For Aurobindo concentration is only a means, a key to superconscious planes of existence. He upholds inward concentration in contrast to concentration on external objects. It is this inward concentration that the seeker of knowledge must effect. And it is neither a strenuous one-pointedness on the one subject, nor a laborious contemplation of one object of thought-vision. Instead, it involves stilling the mind and unveiling its secret peace. When this is done, a great calm settles on one's being and there follows the experience of the all-pervading Brahman. Once this state is obtained, strenuous concentration is no longer necessary. For integral yoga this is the most direct and powerful discipline.

Psychic and Spiritual Transformation

The fourth phase of integral yoga is psychic transformation. Every human being has a greater consciousness beyond the physical frame through which one can participate in a higher and broader life. This consciousness is greater and more powerful than the human mind. What the human mind does not know and cannot do, this consciousness knows and does. The Mother says: 'With psychic education we come to the problem of the true motive of life, the

reason of our existence upon earth, the very discovery to which this life must lead and the result of that discovery: the consecration of the individual to his eternal principle.⁸

The psychic being is a conscious form of the Divine manifesting in the evolutionary process. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The true central being is the soul, but this being stands back and in most human natures is only the secret witness or, one might say, a constitutional ruler who allows his ministers to rule for him, delegates to them his empire, silently assents to their decisions and only now and then puts in a word which they can at any moment override and act otherwise. ... It is by the coming forwards of this true monarch and his taking up of the reins of government that there can take place a real harmonisation of our being and our life.⁹

The discovery of the soul, the real person within, is truly the first great goal of human life. But the discovery is a matter of personal effort and aspiration. A great resolution, a strong will, and an untiring perseverance are indispensable to reach this goal. Each one must chalk out his or her own path through difficulties. Many of those who have reached the goal have 'described it more or less clearly. But the supreme value of the discovery lies in its spontaneity, its ingenuousness, and that escapes all ordinary mental laws.'¹⁰ The Mother explains:

The starting point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion, unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend, and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all ... everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without

time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation (32-3).

This path is difficult, strewn with obstacles and problems. 'It is', the Mother says, 'like the explorer's trek through virgin forest in quest of an unknown land, of some great discovery' (33). The psychic realization, however, is different from the spiritual:

For one it is a higher realization upon earth, for the other, an escape from all earthly manifestation, even from the whole universe, a return to the unmanifest.

So one can say that the psychic life is immortal life, endless time, limitless space, even-progressive change, unbroken continuity in the universe of forms. The spiritual consciousness, on the other hand, means to live the infinite and the eternal, to be projected beyond all creation, beyond time and space. To become conscious of your psychic being and to live a psychic life you must abolish all egoism; but to live a spiritual life you must no longer have an ego (35-6).

Descent of the Supramental

The merger into the Absolute, the formless, is supreme liberation, which has been presented in many spiritual systems as the highest goal of human endeavour. Patanjali elaborates on this in the 'Samadhi Pada' and 'Kaivalya Pada' of the *Yoga Sutra*. Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga differs here. He raises the significant question: Does this give a satisfactory meaning to our terrestrial existence? In Patanjali's yoga there are only two movements: involution and evolution. Sri Aurobindo's yoga, on the other hand, consists of a triple movement: involution, evolution, and the descent of the Supramental. Involution is a downward movement. Sri Aurobindo accepts the primacy of the supreme, all-pervading Reality, which the *Isha Upanishad* thus exhorts us to view: '*Isha vasyam-idam sarvam yat-kincha jagatyam jagat*'; all this—whatsoever moves on the earth—should be covered by the Lord.' Consciousness pervades not only the manifest cosmos but also the unmanifest; it is transcendent yet realizable.

This basic reality of immanence and transcendence Sri Aurobindo accepts *in toto*. And it is on this basic premise that his integral yoga rests.

The first movement in integral yoga is involution: the process of Creation in which the supreme Reality descended in stages, finally plunging into the most inconscient, deep, and dense matter. After involution begins an upward spiral—this is spiritual evolution, the ascent. In Aurobindo's philosophy the human being is not the end product of Creation or the crown of the evolutionary process. It holds that humans are intermediate creatures, though they do mark the essence of evolution of consciousness. Humans have the capacity to reach upwards into the Supramental, which is ready to cooperate in the process of evolution. Then comes the third movement, and this is a very important component of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. It is the return of the supramental consciousness, along with its light and power, to the terrestrial plane, with the purpose of divinizing the whole of humanity. Sri Aurobindo does not accept the idea of one enjoying the bliss of supramental power leaving the rest of the world as wretched as it was before. These three movements together constitute integral yoga. The sadhaka's goal is not to seek salvation for oneself, or for a community, or a race; a total transformation of terrestrial life is the goal. This very world is to be transformed into the Supramental.

Sri Aurobindo's yoga is unique in its integration of four major strands: bhakti, karma, jnana, and raja yoga. It is 'integral' because it does not aim at liberation alone or at perfection derived from a singular practice; instead it aims at transformation of the whole human being. And it takes up all of nature for this transformation. Divine fulfilment of life is its goal. Ascent in this yoga is a means to descent.

Patanjali's yoga is rooted in the Vedic tradition. The existence of the Supramental was a Vedic discovery. Patanjali devised a systematic method for attaining the Supramental. Later schools also worked on the process of bringing the Supramental back to the terrestrial plane. The Bhagavadgita did it by embracing the truths of Upanishadic know-

ledge and prescribing a synthesis of the paths of love, knowledge, and works. The Tantras took up the idea of perfectibility of the human being and synthesized the methods of hatha yoga and raja yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo, the special methods of raja yoga and hatha yoga may be useful in certain stages of spiritual progress, but are not indispensable to integral yoga. This yoga rejects the exclusiveness of the old systems while affirming the reality of matter; it repudiates the denial of the ascetic while affirming the reality of the Spirit; it reconciles matter, life, mind, and Supermind. It is the philosophy of integral monism as distinct from pure monism or qualified monism. It avoids every rigid determinism; it is an idealism that is realistic and a realism that is idealistic.

Beyond Philosophy and Religion


According to Sri Aurobindo the age of philosophy and religion is over. We are now in the age of realization. This age insists on the deepest, widest, and highest realizations that can be attained by the methods of yoga. Philosophy aims at discovering the highest reality through critical rational thought, while religion explores the same by means of beliefs and rituals. Both these are found inadequate in meeting contemporary human needs. Sri Aurobindo maintains that what we need is a comprehensive, all-inclusive, scientific method that can bring about a radical change in human consciousness. And yoga fulfils this need as it is 'a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos.'¹¹

Integral yoga is an integral realization of the Divine: 'Not only the freedom born of unbroken contact of the individual being in all its parts with the Divine, *sayujyamukti*, ... not only the *salokyamukti* by which the whole conscious existence dwells in the same status of being as the Divine, ... but also the acquisition of the divine nature by the transformation of this lower being into the human image of the

divine, *sadharmyamukti*, and the complete and final release of all' (42–3). Transformation is the key word in integral yoga, as much as in Patanjali's yoga. And it carries a deep connotation. Sri Aurobindo explains:

By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature—I do not mean, for instance, sainthood or ethical perfection or yogic siddhis (like the Tantrik's) or a transcendental (*cinmaya*) body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. ... A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and yoga.¹²

Sri Aurobindo does not regard the spirit in man as 'solely an individual being travelling to a transcendent unity with the Divine, but as a universal being capable of oneness with the Divine in all souls and all Nature'.¹³

Integral yoga involves three major transformations: one, the human soul seeks liberation and enjoys union with the Divine; two, it freely shares in the cosmic unity of the Divine; three, it effectuates the divine purpose by being an instrument of the divine Will in its movements through humanity. The complete process of transformation is described by Sri Aurobindo as being threefold—psychic, spiritual, and supramental. The individual yoga then transcends its separateness and becomes part of the collective yoga of the Divine, in nature and in humanity. The liberated individual thus becomes a self-perfecting instrument for the perfect flowering of the Divine. 

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2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation*

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3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971), 508.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *A System of National Education* <<http://www.ncte-in.org/pub/aurobin/aurowrit.htm>> accessed 4 March 2009.
5. *On Education*, 21.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Twin Lakes: Lotus Light, 1999), 229.
7. *Synthesis of Yoga*, 303.
8. *On Education*, 30.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Calcutta: Arya, 1940), 925–6.
10. *On Education*, 32.
11. *Synthesis of Yoga*, 2.
12. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, 2 vols (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1969), 2.94.
13. *Synthesis of Yoga*, 587.

(Continued from page 329)

10. *Pramāṇas*, facts of right knowledge, are based on perception, inference, or authentic verbal testimony. *Viparyaya* is wrong knowledge, characterized by a lack of correspondence between one's conception of a thing and the thing itself. *Vikalpa* or fancy is an image conjured up by words without any substance behind it. *Smṛti*, memory, is recall of a past experience in the mind. *Nidrā* is sleep, a modification of the mind characterized by the absence of any content. To Patanjali even *nidrā* is a *vṛtti*.
11. The philosophy of *kleśas* is of foundational importance in Patanjali's yoga. The *kleśas*, emotional reactions, are five in number: *avidyā*, ignorance; *asmitā*, egoism; *rāga*, attachment; *dveṣa*, aversion, and *abhiniveśa*, clinging to life. *Avidyā*, ignorance, is described as the field productive of the other four *kleśas*. It is persistent and, unlike *rāga* and *dveṣa*, not directed at specific objects.
12. *Yoga Sutra*, 1.13.
13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.208.
14. *Yoga Sutra*, 3.7.
15. In the first stage of samadhi, consciousness is centred in the lower mental world and functions through the mental plane, *manomaya kośa*. As it rises higher, consciousness gets focused on the *vijñānamaya* and the *ānandamaya kośas*, ultimately getting established in the pure consciousness of the Atman. See I K Taimni, *The Science of Yoga* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing, 1961), 293.

Sister Nivedita: Art for National Awakening

Dr Anil Baran Ray

(Continued from the March issue)

NIVEDITA believed that historical tableaux presented through nationalist processions could function as a means of arousing a sense of nationality among Indians and in making Indians proud of it. It was with similar ends in view that she conceived the idea of a national emblem, a national flag, and a national medal in the name of Swami Vivekananda. She chose the *vajra*, thunderbolt, as the national emblem of India for it signified *strength*, *selflessness*, and *sacrifice*—the three timeless values that could best sustain India as a nation. Nivedita also prepared her own design of an Indian national flag with ‘Bande Mataram’ inscribed on it. These efforts show how intensely she felt the need for arousing a sense of nationality among Indians. Her efforts in preparing a suitable design of the national medal named after Swami Vivekananda were also remarkable. She made several sketches of the medal and sought French expert Lalique’s advice about the appropriate design. The medal was to remind people of the idea of the all-round awakening that Swamiji sought to instil in the minds and hearts of his countrymen.

Indianness in Art

In her book *Aggressive Hinduism*, Nivedita spelt out her ideas on what she called the National Art of India, providing guidelines on how such art should and could develop in India. It took her just three evenings to finish writing this small book, and she was down with brain fever two days later. In view of the death she apprehended at that time, she called the thesis expounded in *Aggressive Hinduism* her ‘last Will and Testament’ to the nation.¹

National flag as
designed by Nivedita;
the background is red



‘Art must be reborn,’ Nivedita observed, not as the ‘miserable travesty of would-be Europeanism’ but in a truly Indianized form. India herself was to be the subject of this new art. The ‘new’ artists subscribing to such line of thinking on Indian Art were to take as their subjects the happenings of daily life of the common Indian folk. Nivedita herself gives some examples: ‘Ah, to be a thinker in bronze and give to the world the beauty of the Southern *Pariah*, as he swings, scarce-clad, along the Beach-Road at Madras! Ah, to be a Millet, and paint the woman worshipping at dawn beside the sea! Oh for a pencil that would interpret the beauty of the Indian sari; the gentle life of village and temple; the coming and going at the Ganges side; the play of the children; the faces, and the labours, of the cows!’² She also wanted the new artists to portray the Indian heroes of old—Bhishma and Yudhishtira, Akbar and Sher Shah, Pratap Singh and Chand Bibi—in such fashion as to stir the blood of the present generation of Indians (3,504).

In sum, it was Nivedita’s fervent hope that by regenerating Indian art, by Indianizing it, by focusing on India herself as the subject of art, by portraying the Indian heroes of old, the civic and national ideals, the daily happenings in the life of the common people of India, by giving utterance for the first time to the idea of India herself, and by bringing about a union of idealism and realism in such utterances the young artists of India would let Indians know that they were *one* in their Indianness

and that they were great as a nation. Such was the 'battle', such were the 'new duties of the time', and such was 'the mission of art' that the new art movement of India—begun at the instance of Swami Vivekananda, Okakura Kakuzo, E B Havell, and Nivedita herself—had to accomplish.

Nivedita's letter of 16 July 1906 is an invaluable expression of her resolve and commitment to promote Indian art as a means of turning India into a strong nation.³ The following points are noteworthy:

(i) In keeping with her central objective of bringing awareness of the artistic heritage of India to the whole nation, including the common folk who could not afford expensive colour pictures, Nivedita felt that cartoon drawings might serve the purpose well, as they allow for cheap reprints. All the same, but for the cost, Nivedita's preference was for mural paintings.

(ii) With her other objective of giving India back her old or classical art as a means of reminding her of her past glory and thus motivating her to become a strong nation, Nivedita's preference was for cartoons on subjects from Indian history.

(iii) Nivedita firmly held that Indian subjects must be represented in Indian art, and in Indian style. By Indian style she meant the 'style inspired by oriental precedents' as exemplified in old manuscripts and sculptures of India. She, however, was not against select European motifs as exemplified in the works of such artists as de Chavannes, Monvel, and Rossetti, as well as in pre-Raphaelite and medieval art.

As for sculpture, Nivedita's great favourite were the Buddhist sculptures, particularly those at Ellora. She wanted that artists make copies of the Buddhist sculptures preserved in museums and historical places and that these be circulated in cheap reprints; in this way the masses would get to know the great heights Indian sculpture had reached in the past and would become convinced of the necessity of making renewed efforts towards achieving similar milestones in art.

As for the size, Nivedita preferred 'heroic size'

to miniatures, because heroic sizes commanded the attention of people better than miniatures. On the whole, Nivedita wanted no mechanical 'hand and eye' art for India, but art with 'brain plus heart'—done with the idea of national oneness, national glory, and national strength. 'The Rebirth of the National art is my dearest dream,' declared Nivedita, and she was convinced that only through such rebirth could India become 'a strong nation' (2.819).

Abanindranath Tagore

In her effort to make Indian art truly nationalist and powerful, with imaginative presentation of ideas, Nivedita got an enthusiastic ally in Abanindranath Tagore. Abanindranath was appointed vice principal of the Calcutta art school in 1898. Havell was the man behind the appointment, and it was he who persuaded Abanindranath to accept the offer. At first, Abanindranath was hesitant to take up this assignment. He did not have any previous job experience. Besides, he was deeply grieved by the death of one of his young daughters and was not keeping good health. He also had the habit of smoking hookah seven times a day and was polite enough to point out that, being given to such a habit, he could not possibly be good enough for any job. But Havell would not relent. He promised to take care of Abanindranath's personal habits, as also of his health, by making suitable arrangements, including his mid-day meal at the art school. As for routine office-work, Havell assured Abanindranath that this would be handled by the headmaster and head clerk of the school, and that Abanindranath would be left free to do his own paintings and teach the young students at the school. It was only through such persuasion that Havell was able to induce Abanindranath to accept the post of vice principal at the Calcutta art school. This undoubtedly speaks volumes for Havell's unbounded love for Indian art and his recognition of Abanindranath's talent.⁴

Having joined the Calcutta art school, Abanindranath was quick to appreciate the work that awaited him: he was to create paintings with Indian ideas and make art a vehicle for expressing

the glory of national life—past, present, and future. Nivedita constantly stressed this theme. This common perception of Indian art drew Nivedita and Abanindranath close to each other and gave the new Indian art movement a great boost.

Abanindranath gave expression to the nationalist philosophy of art through such masterpieces as *Bharat-Mata*—India the Mother—during the nationalist Swadeshi movement.⁵ Published in the June 1906 number of the magazine *Bhandar*, *Bharat-Mata* gave expression to the heritage, glory, and aspirations of the nation that was India. Nivedita wrote appreciatively:

We have here a picture which bids fair to prove the beginning of a new age in Indian art. Using all the added means of expression which the modern period has bestowed upon him, the artist [Abanindranath] has here given expression nevertheless to a purely Indian idea, in Indian form. The curving line of lotuses and the white radiance of the halo are beautiful additions to the Asiatically-conceived figure with its four arms, as the symbol of the divine multiplication of power. This is the first masterpiece, in which an Indian artist has actually succeeded in disengaging, as it were, the spirit of the motherland—giver of Faith and Learning, of Clothing and Food—and portraying Her, as she appears to the eyes of Her children.⁶

In the August 1906 issue of *The Indian World* Nivedita dwelt more explicitly on the significance of the *Bharat-Mata* painting:

One, it was 'the first great masterpiece in a new style', done by an Indian for his own people. The subject was typically Indian and the style too refreshingly Indian: 'As one looks into its qualities, one is struck by the purity and delicacy of the personality portrayed.'

Two, the painting was a 'combination of perfect refinement with great creative imagination'. Standing on the green earth, with the blue sky behind, and white lotuses beneath her exquisite feet, Bharat Mata, with her four hands symbolizing divine power, was bestowing on her children the four gifts of 'Shiksha-Diksha-Anna-Bastra'. 'From beginning to end the picture is an



Bharat Mata, by Abanindranath Tagore

appeal, in the Indian language, to the Indian heart.'

Three, the picture marks the beginning of a new age in Indian painting in emphatically conveying the idea that if Indians were to be worthy children of Bharat Mata, they were to make 'nationality, and the civic ideal, and every form of free and vigorous co-operation for mutual service and mutual aid' the distinguishing marks of their lives. The symbolism of *Bharat-Mata* was meant to give such direction to the Indians in the decades ahead (357–60).

It is the feature mentioned last that Nivedita characterized as the central function of art in contemporary India. Nivedita went ecstatic over *Bharat-Mata* as she saw it fulfilling this central

function of art towards nation-making in India. She wrote how she would utilize this painting to unite the people of India in their love towards 'the Spirit of the Motherland, the giver of all good': 'I would reprint it, if I could, by tens of thousands, and scatter it broadcast over the land, till there was not a peasant's cottage, or a craftsman's hut, between Kedar Nath and Cape Comorin, that had not this presentment of Bharat-Mata somewhere on its walls' (3.60).

Having answered 'what' Indian art stood for, Nivedita next indicated how she would go about the task of utilizing art to rouse historic, civic, and national consciousness among Indians. First, if enough resources were available, she would use these to promote civic and historic paintings. To that end, she would 'open competitions and announce prizes, and establish picture-printing presses for cheap reproduction of coloured pictures'.

Second, she would build open verandas running round three sides of a square and have their walls covered with murals 'of the mighty scenes of the civic and national past': 'Ashoka sending forth his missionaries; Kanishka seated in council; Vikramaditya offering the Ashvamedha; the twelve crowned victims of Cheetore—the Coronation of Akbar; the building of the Taj; the funeral of Aurangzeb; the sati of the Queen Jahnabi of hill Tipperah—these, and such as these, should be the subjects here displayed' (3.58).

Nivedita's purpose in having such subjects displayed in open verandas was three-fold: (i) to make every Indian, 'every woman on her way to the river-ghat, and every labourer going to and from his work' familiar with 'the idea of India, and the evolution of India through four thousand years'; (ii) to turn open verandas into schools or libraries or universities and to make them serve as civic temples or learning houses of the national spirit; and (iii) to raise—by providing all Indians with access to Indian art—the historic, civic, and national sense of Indians and thereby to inspire them to make even greater efforts towards bringing glory to the motherland.

Nivedita noted that both the houses of the Eng-

lish Parliament had scenes of 'aristocratic and democratic pride' depicted on murals in their lobbies. But being frescoes inside buildings, they were accessible only to those who were 'more or less wealthy and already educated'. Nivedita would not have any such restriction either in viewership or in the means of education. She would rather have murals depicting historical and civic value on roadside verandas, available to one and all, thus making universities of the open verandas.

Third, since building picture galleries even on roadside verandas would cost a fortune, Nivedita suggested that contemporary art students draw Swadeshi pictures and have the cheap colour reproductions of such pictures distributed by the thousand. With cheap substitutes of expensive mural paintings reaching every nook and corner of the country, a large number of Indian hearts could come in touch with genuine Indian artwork, fulfilling thus the goal of raising civic and national consciousness. As the first piece of art for such a series Nivedita recommended *Bharat-Mata* by Abanindranath.

Abanindranath's other paintings that excited Nivedita's admiration and received her appreciative comments include *The Passing of Shah Jahan* and *Sita*.

Nivedita considered *The Passing of Shah Jahan* a 'superb' drawing and approvingly quoted the reputed art critic A K Coomaraswamy: 'Not only is he [Abanindranath] what could not have been expected in India at present, but also probably of first rank in Europe.' (3.63). Nivedita admired Shah Jahan, not because he was a successful general, unrivalled administrator, or a hugely wealthy monarch, but because he sang an 'immortal song in honour of his beloved'. And his beloved was as much India, the land he ruled, as his wife Arzmand Banu: 'For are the buildings and cities his genius has left—dedicated to Arzamand Banu, his wife, and to India, Goddess and Mother—not a poem sung in marble by the lips of a sovereign? Never verily in the history of the world, did any single monarch build like this. And never one who was not enamoured and enrapt of a passion for the land he ruled' (ibid.).

As for *Sita*, Nivedita believed that the strength of the painting lay in its striking departure from the conventional ways in which *Sita* used to be depicted. Abanindranath did not present *Sita* with the customary features of a beautiful Hindu woman. By giving *Sita* a retreating brow and a thick neck, he presented her first as a strong woman and only afterwards as a great wife, thus reversing the order in which *Sita* is portrayed in the *Ramayana*. Abanindranath's *Sita* is great in the strength of her noble womanhood. Thus, the idea conveyed through the picture, observes Nivedita, is that strong and noble womanhood must be a major constituent of the nation that is India, that new patterns of art must be created out of the old, and that only by making efforts in such direction would the new art movement in India assume significance.

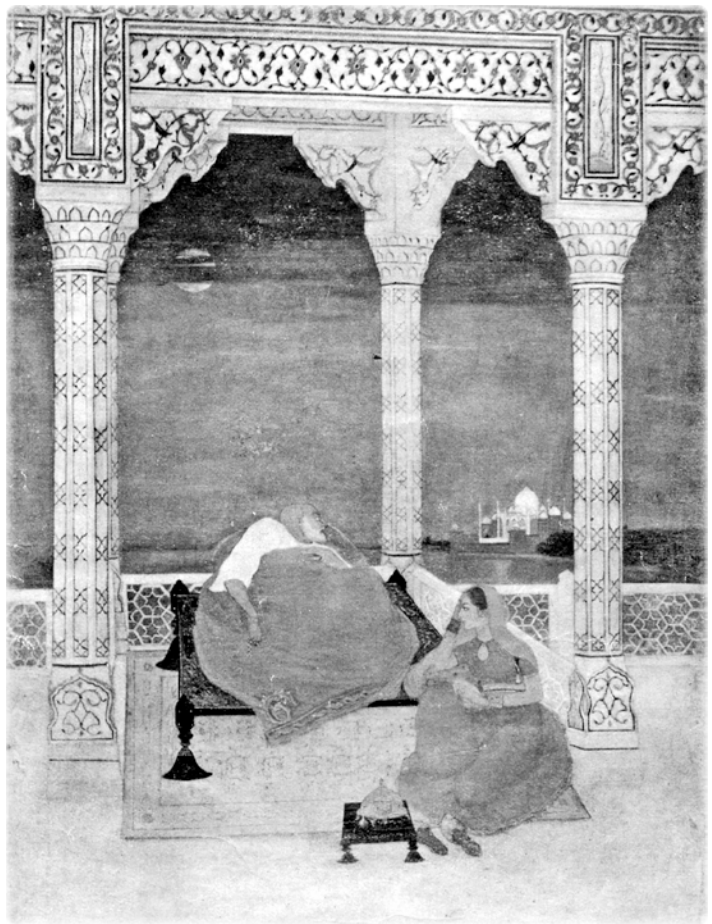
Nivedita assigned the following three-fold function to the new art movement that she and Havell, inspired by Swami Vivekananda's views and Okakura's example, set in motion and whose progress was now in the hands of artists like Abanindranath: (i) to regenerate and rejuvenate art in India with genuine Indianness as distinguished from sham Europeanism, (ii) to have India herself as the master-subject of art, and (iii) to make art accessible to the common people of India.

Through his paintings, Abanindranath fulfilled these functions so well that Nivedita warmly referred to him as the leader of the new art movement in India,⁷ and she felt secure in the belief that even after Havell's departure to England the future of the new art movement in India would be safe in the hands of the Tagores such as Abanindranath (2.1085).

(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 3.xii. See also *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.836.
2. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 3.503.
3. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.818–20.



The Passing of Shah Jahan, by Abanindranath Tagore

4. Abanindranath was not a student of Havell. Yet, in his autobiography *Jorasankor Dhare*, he reverentially refers to Havell as his guru and unhesitatingly acknowledges that but for the wholehearted support of Havell he could not have landed the vice-principalship of the art school. He also acknowledges candidly that Havell gave him more love than he himself could ever give to his own disciples such as Nandalal. See also *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.1287.
5. We have it from Nandalal Basu that Abanindranath drew this picture during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal and named it *Banga-Mata*. At the time of its publication in *Bhandar*, however, the picture was titled *Bharat-Mata*. According to Nandalal, it was Sister Nivedita who suggested this change in name. See Panchanan Mondal, *Bharat Shilpi Nandalal*, 4 vols (Bolpur: Rarh Gabeshana Parshad, 1389 BE), 1.435.
6. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 3.57. The Bengali translation of Nivedita's comments appeared in the August 1906 number of *Prabasi*.
7. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.991.



God's Own Abode

Dr Aparna Chattopadhyay

P RISTINE and beautiful as the morning dew—goddess Naina Devi's mystical abode is still fresh in my memory after my visit to Nainital during last Navratri. Shrouded in the mystic Kumaon hills, a land resplendent in awesome natural splendour, a jewel of the glittering Himalayan necklace. Surrounded by deciduous and pine trees amid haunting dreamy mists, the enchanting temple at a height of 1,938 metres above sea level symbolizes ethereal beauty with a distinctive divine touch. Situated around a blue lake which is shaped like an eye or crescent, and resembling a silvery disc held in cupped hands, its endless panorama of scenic wonders is nothing short of a romance with a soul-lifting nature itself.

I go back down memory lane and recall my fascinating experience of a mystical encounter amidst the sacred premises of the Naina Devi temple. My reverie begins with a sudden soft drizzle pouring down in tiny droplets over the clear blue waters of the Naini Lake overlooking the Naina Devi temple—the colourful boats looking like gay butterflies sailing across the lake, the surrounding blue-grey hills, the friendly little shops lining the pleasing mall buzzing with chirpy young tourists, the vendors selling bright red cherries in fascinating flower-shaped leaf cups, the priests chanting mantras and the devotees thronging the temple, the haunting sound of conches and the ringing of the *arati* bells at the temple. I am back on those vivid memories, still weaving the magic of an out-of-the-world ex-

perience for countless travellers, every year. Their appeal seems timeless, untrammelled in their intoxication and purity. Vibrantly alive with fun-filled moments amidst exotic wild flowers and fruits, lush-green gardens, elegant buildings, and bazaars flooded with amazing handicrafts, the giggles and laughter of the starry-eyed teenage folks shopping at the famous Bhutani market behind the temple, the mad rush for the darshan of the benevolent deity in the glittering temple, the power of prayer in the air with its inexplicable intoxication of spirituality—my heart is filled with awe.

Touched by the ethereal beauty of the Naini Lake, sitting on the temple hills overlooking it, I gaze longingly at its transparent waters flowing so very close to me. The cool moist breeze gently caressing me seems to whisper inaudibly into my ear 'Hey! Feel the divine touch. You're in heaven.' And indeed I feel that, as the sacred lake in its shimmering glory smiles majestically at me, tucked miles away from the dust and heat of the congested Delhi.

'It's all so out of the world,' I muse inaudibly as I gaze reflectively at the meandering blue hills. I am reminded of the popular stories about a natural rocky Shiva-linga emerging out of the waters along the lake's bank that touches the temple. I strain my eyes to peep deep into the waters with the hope of catching a glimpse of the Shiva-linga. Just then the tiny rain droplets turn fierce, streaming down my hair and forcing me to take shelter in the adjoining spacious canopy of the temple premises. Inspired by

the electrifying vibrations of the place, I bow down, kneeling before the image of the gracious deity, offering my silent prayers in deep reverence. Immediately I feel an upsurge of a strange peace filling me all over. In a world wickedly overflowing with corruption I feel the amazing, pure, and unique vibes uplift and rejuvenate my entire psyche. I feel empowered by a divine touch leaving its invisible imprint on me.

Fascinated by the beautiful downpour, I stretch my palm unconsciously to gather a few droplets.

'You have a very good sun-line.'

The sudden remark startles me. It's from an astrologer seated nearby on a woollen *asana*. He seems to have surveyed my outstretched palm. Some mystical force inspires me, for the first time in my life, to stretch my palm before him—a total stranger to me. Looking intently at it for a while, he makes certain remarkably true observations about my past. He further forewarns me about some alarming future events, which indeed take place later on. I offer to tip him, but he refuses saying, 'I am here primarily to serve Ma's devotees.' There is an aura of peace and contentment around his serene face.

'Tell me something about this temple,' I enquire eagerly. 'The history of this sacred temple,' he narrates, 'can be traced back to the ancient era in which, legend has it, the enraged Shiva performed his tandava dance while holding the corpse of his beloved wife Parvati, who had preferred death to the insult of her husband on the occasion of a yajna in her father's home. It is said that to save the whole universe from being destroyed by the devastating wrath of Shiva, Vishnu distracted him by severing Parvati's corpse into fifty-one—one hundred and eight, according to some—pieces, which fell over different parts of the country. Each place where a portions of Mother Parvati's body fell became sanctified and came to be known as a Shaktipitha. The sacred Naini temple is one of them, where the left eye of Ma Parvati is supposed to have fallen.'


His eyes gleam with conviction as he continues, 'Thousands of devotees throng the temple throughout the year, especially during the Navratri days,

seeking the blessings of the goddess; and they come back again for thanksgiving after their wishes get fulfilled, as they invariably do.'

I look reverently at the beautiful temple, haunted by the magical confluence of its exquisite scenic serenity and electrifying spirituality. It turns dusky soon. The rosette glow of the azure skies looks captivating. The wise astrologer gets up, putting his sacred *asana* in his shoulder bag and calling it a day. Just then a couple eagerly approaches, wishing to consult him for a seemingly important issue.

'Sorry, I have packed up my *asana* now. I foretell the future for Ma's devotees through the grace of her power alone. At this moment I am as ordinary as you. You see, it's she who speaks through me.' There is a mystic air in his manner.

Amazed at his forthrightness, I sit still, watching his stately figure receding slowly into the distant shadows. I get an eerie feeling about the whole episode—the weird prophecy of the strange astrologer, the sacred and charged atmosphere—all seem to combine together, producing a mystical encounter for me.

My enchanted reverie comes to an end. But is it not just the beginning? Something within tells me that wandering along the labyrinth of life, someday, I shall certainly come back to it once again. 

Naina Devi temple



Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

44. Kāma-krodha-moha-smṛtibhramśa-buddhināśa-sarvanāśa-kāraṇatvāt.

Because it [evil company] leads to desire, anger, delusion, loss of memory, loss of discrimination, and utter ruin.

JUST as you should know how to proceed towards God, similarly you should also know how one gradually goes away from God. You must know the pits and ditches on the path so that you may avoid them. You need not brood over them but must avoid them carefully. You must have both types of knowledge and must mould your life accordingly. You must be aware of God and beware of pitfalls. This is all-comprehensive practical wisdom.

Narada takes up Sri Krishna's statement in the Gita and graphically describes the path of gradual ruin in one sutra. Sri Krishna says:

*Dhyāyato viṣayān-puṁsaḥ
saṅgas-teṣūpajāyate;
Saṅgāt saṅjāyate kāmaḥ
kāma-krodho'bhijāyate.*

In the case of a person who dwells on objects, there arises attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire breeds anger.

*Krodhād-bhavati saṁmohaḥ
saṁmohāt-smṛti-vibhramah;
Smṛti-bhramśād-buddhināśo
buddhi-nāśāt-praṇaśyati.*

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

From anger comes delusion; from delusion, failure of memory; from failure of memory, loss of discrimination; and from loss of discrimination one perishes.

Dhyāyato: This is how it starts, with thought, and ends with *vināśa* ruin. Ruin does not come in a day. There is an invisible mental beginning. At the time of conception the mother does not know. She comes to know only after some days. This first invisible cause is *viṣaya-dhyāna*, thinking of objects of enjoyment. Such faint attraction, just a ripple, does not appear dangerous. But out of this attraction, *saṅga*, arises attachment. There might be a 'casual glance', but the tendency to repeat it is dynamic, and will grow into a subject-object drag. You will like to know the details of the object. This *saṅga* or contact does not remain vague for long, it develops into desire for enjoyment of the object—lust, money, power, name, fame, and so on. It is dynamic.

Since the world is relative, there are always inconveniences and obstacles to enjoyment; but as the pull has become dynamic, you immediately get disturbed. This is *krodha*, which does not mean anger alone. One may or may not be angry outwardly, but the mind is disturbed, ruffled. Such a mind gets clouded, confused, deluded; this is *saṁmoha*, a psychological cloud covering the understanding. This dynamism of *bhoga*, enjoyment, brings *smṛti-vibhrama*, forgetfulness of life's ideal. Then *viveka*, discrimination, is completely destroyed—*buddhi-nāśa*. Acharya Shankara says that you are a man because of *viveka*. As soon as you lose it, you cease to be a man. And then such a person does all sorts of irrational things. He is completely lost in *bhoga*—ruined from the standpoint of the ideal.

Thus Narada warns the sadhaka that he must

know the sequence of ruin. If you do not treat the disease in the beginning, it will lead to death.

45. Taraṅgāyitā apīme saṅgāt samudrāyante.

Though arising as ripples, they become like the ocean due to evil company.

Generally a person thinks, 'Let me just enjoy the object, I shall leave it in time.' But *saṅga*, the contact and the pull caused by attachment, keeps one stuck, like the *bhramara* or black bee on the lotus. It thinks it will leave before evening. But the lotus closes upon it. Then it thinks it will escape in the morning. But, alas, an elephant comes and swallows the lotus along with the *bhramara*. For this reason Narada warns: do not wait for the future; nip attachment in the bud by giving up association from the very beginning, however sweet it may appear. Prevention is better than cure. If you don't, it will not remain a ripple but will go on growing into an ocean. If you want to live a spiritual life, cut off all attachments, not only for objects related to lust, but all attachments. Uncompromising renunciation of all attachments alone can save you from ruin.

46. Kastarati kastarati māyām? Yaḥ saṅgān tyajati, yo mahānubhāvaṁ sevate, nirmamo bhavati.

Who crosses, who crosses maya? He who avoids sense-contact, serves the great sages, and becomes free from the sense of possession.

Here Narada suggests a technique of sadhana by giving expression to the marks of one who has crossed the ocean of maya. Note the characteristics of such a personality and try to feel them within your being. This is a very effective sadhana.

Kastarati kastarati māyām? This is not a mere question but an introduction to the ideal personality. The features of perfection naturally revealed in a person who has realized the ideal should be felt by the sadhaka. Then the conditions of realization will manifest in the sadhaka's consciousness and will automatically give intensity to his sadhana, making it dynamic. The repetition shows Narada's

great earnestness. It also means that it is not a joke to cross maya.

The plural *saṅgān*, attachments, indicates all attachments and forces causing psychological pulls. You cannot realize God if you keep father, mother, and different objects in your conscious or subconscious mind. You may or may not have physical contact with all of them, but the psychological pulls may be working all the same. All conscious, subconscious, and unconscious pulls and attachments must be given up through the sadhana described before.

Mahānubhāva-seva: Service to great souls who have realized the Reality and have gone beyond the subject-object consciousness through absolute identification with that Reality.

Nirmama: No 'aham', no 'mama', no 'me' and 'mine'—no reactions related to these.

47. Yo vivikta-sthānaṁ sevate, yo loka-bandham-unmūlayati, (yo) nistraiguṇyo bhavati, (yo) yoga-kṣemaṁ tyajati.

He who resides in solitary places, who roots out his bondages, goes beyond the three guṇas, and gives up all acquisition and preservation.

As has been said, in these sutras the features of a perfected personality are being described. These are some expressions of the subject-object-less state, in which ignorance and ego are destroyed. These marks must be accepted as the criteria for your sadhana.

Vivikta-sthānaṁ sevate: The consciousness of such a personality is that of one absolute Reality. Hence, in him there is always a transcendental calmness without any digression or disturbance from the world.

Loka-bandham unmūlayati: Bondages are rooted out, for the root of bondage is ignorance. The subject-object realism is produced by ignorance. People beget children and thus renounce Bhagavan, the absolute Reality, to pay the debt due to their forefathers, *pitr-ṛṇa*; but the forefathers have no absolute existence! This is an example of the bondage of the world.

Narada asks us to meditate on such a personality from whom all bondages have gone away. From him you will learn that no bond of duty, nor any other bond, exists for one who really wants to progress in spiritual life.

Nistraiguṇyo bhavati: Triguna means subject-object dichotomy. For a person who has experienced Reality nothing else appears real, he goes beyond the three guṇas.

Yoga-kṣemaṁ tyajati: Since he has gone beyond the subject-object dichotomy, acquisition or possession is not possible for him, because they are possible only as long as ‘me and mine’ exist.

Thus Narada points out the various effects and aspects of ignorance, and shows that none of them remain in the personality of a man of realization. Such a personality is also an ideal for a sadhaka. All these features are found brilliantly expressed in Sri Ramakrishna. His admonition of Mathur when he wanted to deposit money in Sri Ramakrishna’s name, his absolute merger in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and other similar incidents of his life provide illuminating examples.

48. Yaḥ karmaphalaṁ tyajati, karmāṇi sannyasyati, tato nirdvandvo bhavati.

He who renounces the fruits of actions, even renounces karma; thus goes beyond dualities.

Since he has no subject-object consciousness, this renunciation takes place naturally in him. You will also have to transcend the joy that comes from your good actions.

Karma-sannyāsa: Since he has no I-sense, there is no karma for him. What you see in only *lilā-karma*, work as play.

Nirdvandva: This is the natural effect of his realization. This is the consciousness beyond all duality.

49. Yo vedānapi sannyasyati, kevalam-avicchinānurāgaṁ labhate.

He who renounces even the Vedas, and obtains unobstructed love.

The scriptures lose all meaning for him. He does not have any more dos and don’ts. Not that his life will

become *aśāstrīya*, contravening scriptural guidelines, but instead of his following the instructions of the scriptures, the instructions will follow his personality—the values expressed in his personality will become the scriptures.

Avicchinna anurāga means uninterrupted love. Due to the flash of absolute realization, there will not remain any world or ‘I’. There will only be ‘Thou and Thou’ alone. So the question of interruption does not arise.

50. Sa tarati sa tarati sa lokāṁstārayati.

He crosses [the ocean of the world], he indeed crosses, he makes people cross the ocean of world.

In a sadhaka who has come to this transcendental state, and has attained *brahma-jñana*, all the negative and positive sadhanas may be given up due to the experience of ananda, bliss. So Narada shows the path beyond. Maya plays with such a *jñana-niṣṭha brahmajña*—whose *mukha*, direction of consciousness, is not at all towards the world—in the form of keeping his ripe ego as ‘I am one with Bhagavan’, a subject-object consciousness of a transcendental order.

51. Anirvacanīyaṁ prema-svarūpam.

It [bhakti] is of the nature of indescribable pure love.

The bhakta feels, with great delight, a transcendental oneness with Bhagavan. There is transcendental duality giving transcendental delight. This ananda of *niṣṭhā-bhakti* now transforms his consciousness. Even his transcendental ‘I’ is in the process of disappearing. The ‘I’ is also felt as the lila of Bhagavan. His ananda becomes so transcendental that there is no describer left. Even the describer is felt as unreal. Hence Narada calls it *anirvacanīya*, indescribable.

52. Mūkāsvādanavat.

Like the taste experience of a mute person.

The word *mūka* indicates the absence of subject-object consciousness.

(To be continued)

Girish and Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Chetanananda

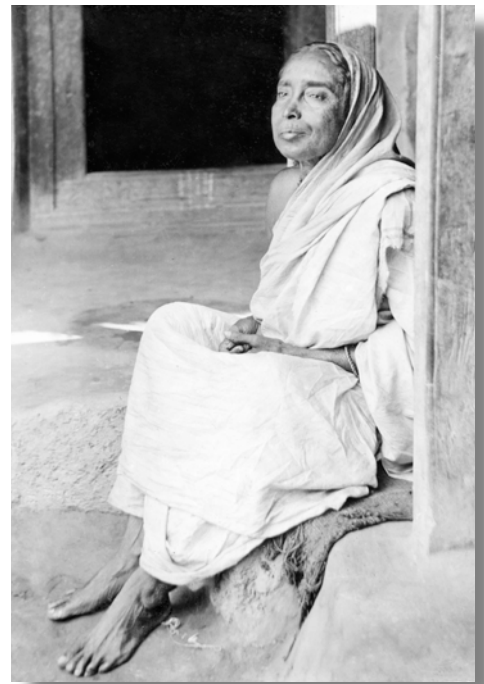
BECAUSE of the bereavements he had suffered, Girish realized the emptiness of family life. During his visit to Jayrambati he approached Holy Mother for her permission to embrace monastic life. But Mother did not give her consent to his request and suggested instead that he continue his literary and acting careers. Girish then gave up the idea of becoming a monk. His long association with the Holy Mother and his visits to the sacred places of Jayrambati and Kamarpukur finally brought solace to Girish's broken heart. He returned to Calcutta and resumed his acting career with fresh vigour and a clearer spiritual outlook.

Girish often visited Holy Mother when she was in Calcutta. Once Holy Mother was returning from a long stay in Jayrambati. Swamis Brahmananda and Premananda went to Howrah station to receive her. The train was three hours late, but the swamis and her devotees waited. When the train arrived, Yogin-ma and Golap-ma helped Mother out of the train and the swamis rushed to take the dust of her feet. Golap-ma was Mother's guard and caretaker. In her high-pitched voice she scolded Swami Brahmananda: 'Maharaj, have you no sense whatsoever? The Mother has just got off the train, tired and worn out by the burning sun; if you make such a fuss about prostrating, how can I restrain the others?' The venerable swamis felt remorseful and stepped back. Mother was then driven to Udbodhan House in a carriage; once there, she went upstairs to rest.

A little later, Swamis Brahmananda and Premananda decided to go to Udbodhan House to confirm that proper arrangements had been made for her. Girish arrived soon after they did and asked

them about Holy Mother. When Golap-ma heard Girish's voice, she came downstairs and said to him: 'My words beat a retreat, Girish Babu, before your grotesque devotion. Say, Girish Babu, you have come here to see Mother. And she is so tired! Without giving her a chance to rest you are here to torture her.' Girish retorted: 'She is surely a boisterous woman! I had thought that the Mother would sooth her heart by looking at her children's faces after such a long time, and this woman is teaching me devotion to the Mother! Phew!' Girish's love and devotion overruled Golap-ma's decrees. After Girish had left, Golap-ma complained to Holy Mother about his rude words. Holy Mother replied: 'I have warned you many times about criticizing my children.'⁷

In 1907 Girish decided to perform Durga Puja at his home, and he and his sister Dakshina wanted Holy Mother to be present on that occasion. They offered to bear all the expenses of her journey. Holy Mother was then at Jayrambati and had been intermittently suffering from malarial fever. Swami Saradananda wrote to the Mother about Girish's desire and the gracious Mother agreed to come to Calcutta. At that time there were riots in Calcutta and the city was blacked out at night.



M [Mahendranath Gupta] and Lalit Chattopadhyay left Calcutta and went to Vishnupur railway station, where they waited for Mother who travelled there by bullock cart. The train arrived at Howrah station after evening. Holy Mother, accompanied by Radhu and her mother, got into Lalit's waiting carriage. M, Lalit, and some devotees escorted them, sitting on the top of the carriage or standing on the footboard. Mother stayed at Balam's house, which was close to Girish's house.

Durga Puja began a few days after they arrived, and it continued for four days. Mother attended the puja at Girish's house from beginning to end. In addition, many devotees came to Balam's house to pay their respects to her. Despite her poor health she sat for hours to fulfil her devotees' wishes. Thus two days passed. It was decided that Holy Mother should rest and not attend Sandhi Puja, which takes place between the *ashtami* and *navami* pujas (the eighth and ninth days of the worship). This special ceremony happened to fall at midnight that year. Girish was upset when he heard this and decided to stay in his room while the worship was going on. However, when the night of Sandhi Puja came, Holy Mother changed her mind. She covered herself with a chadar, walked through the narrow lane, and knocked at the back door of Girish's house, saying: 'Here I am.' Girish's maidservant opened the door and news of the Mother's arrival spread. Girish hurriedly went to the worship hall, bowed down to Mother, and joyfully remarked: 'I thought that my worship had come to nought, and just now the Mother knocks at the door and announces, "Here I am."⁸ After four days of worship and Holy Mother's presence, Girish felt that Mother Durga had graciously accepted his worship. On that auspicious occasion Girish had invited his friends and relatives, as well as the actors and actresses of his theatre, who all received the blessings of the Holy Mother.



Apareshchandra Mukhopadhyay, an actor and playwright, wrote: 'A man sees the outer form of a man, but God sees inside him, and I witnessed

this truth: The Holy Mother, the spiritual consort of Ramakrishna, came to a theatre in Calcutta and embraced an actress who was a courtesan. Thus she demonstrated that God's grace does not discriminate between good and thorny plants, between good and bad human beings, and does not care for the injunctions and prohibitions of the empirical world. That divine grace only purifies all—irrespective of caste and creed.'⁹ The ever-pure Holy Mother accepted and blessed some of the actresses in Girish's theatre. As Ramakrishna gave respectability to the Bengali stage by watching a performance of *Chaitanya Lila*, so also Holy Mother saw several of Girish's plays, and saw him act as well.

It was probably in the last part of the nineteenth century that Holy Mother saw one of Girish's plays for the first time. She went to see *Daksha Yajna* performed at the Minerva Theatre at 6 Beadon Street in Calcutta. Ramakrishna had also seen this play. Girish acted in the role of Daksha. Brahmachari Akshayachaitanya wrote, 'Holy Mother went into ecstasy seeing the play *Daksha Yajna*' (ibid.).

Several years later Girish invited Holy Mother to see *Vilwamangal Thakur*, a popular devotional. Holy Mother went to see it at the Minerva Theatre on Wednesday, 25 January 1905. Girish arranged a royal box seat for Mother and engaged an attendant to fan her with a large palm-leaf fan. Girish acted in the role of a hypocritical monk who was trying to teach Thakmani, a female confidante of the courtesan Chintamani, how to love Krishna. As she watched Girish's performance, Holy Mother commented with a smile, 'Why are you behaving like this in your old age?' And again, observing the one-pointed love of Vilwamangal, the Mother expressed, 'Aha! Aha! [What a wonderful love!]' (ibid.).

(To be concluded)

References

7. *Holy Mother*, 274.
8. Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Sarada Devi, Holy Mother* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1969), 222–3.
9. Arindam Das, 'Minerva Theatre', *Udbodhan*, 107/5 (Jyaishta 1412 BE), 328.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Bridging Social Divides (December 2008)

IT calls for rare editorial courage and integrity to explore a sensitive and touchy theme of this nature, particularly in a magazine of the character, calibre, and tradition of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Please accept our admiration for your effort. It is like treading on very slippery ground, especially on the kind of platform you have chosen.

You are surely well acquainted with the many efforts made, academic and sociological, especially in post-independent India, to understand the caste and communal problem in India, particularly the status of this question in the Mughal and British times. All of them were very 'imperfect' studies, in terms of their micro-analysis, perhaps because the roots of this problem go back to ancient times or the nature of the problems is widespread, touching every aspect of life. I therefore feel that to explore this issue from the perspective of analytical history, as it is understood today, or mythology is futile.

Therefore the corresponding provisions in the Indian constitution, as one learned scholar (Dr S V Desikachar, *Caste, Religion and Country: A View of Ancient and Medieval India*, Orient Longman, 1993) noted, riveted only on palliatives and instant remedies to get over immediate troubles, and little effort has been made to understand the deep underlying causes. ...

I therefore believe that your noble and bold attempt to look at this sensitive issue is a missed opportunity and what in my humble view was of greater relevance is the following:

1. To look at the whole issue from the perspective of Swami Vivekananda instead of bringing in Ram Manohar Lohia and Kaka Kalelkar. ... Kaka Kalelkar had a point in his favour when he predicted that caste based quotas would foster communalism. But he too fell short by his simplistic view of economic criterion alone.

2. Swami Vivekananda's was an entirely positive and all-inclusive approach, without engendering any bitterness. His fundamental plank, as one can see, is the process of what modern sociologists call 'Sanskritization'—education of the so called oppressed classes, an expression used by sociologists like Prof. M N Srinivas. ...

3. In the reservation policy by independent India there were two primary blunders: i) The decision to eliminate the criterion of merit, when job reservations were done on quota. In fact the reservation based on job quotas itself was a primary blunder. ii) The second mistake was not to bring in a system of reserving financial allocations, as a dedicated percentage of GDP or its equivalent, to educate all the oppressed classes to bring them on a par to compete on merit.

4. Perhaps one important aspect the *Prabuddha Bharata* could have looked at, albeit briefly, was the decline and degeneration of Indian cultural and intellectual tradition, maybe from the 10th to 11th century CE, perhaps laying the foundation of Muslim invasion and later British domination. ... 'The eclectic strength itself became a demerit in that there was absence of proselytizing zeal and lack of strong urge to form an integrated religious community, leading to the upper and lower classes of Hindu religion.'

The failure of India was more, perhaps, due to the failure of the provincial rulers from the 15th to 16th century CE than the decline of religion or social order. What were the reasons that led to this decay?

On the whole these are complex and difficult issues.

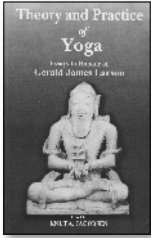
N S Chakravarthy
Mysore



We welcome insightful comments from readers on the themes covered in the recent numbers of *Prabuddha Bharata*.
—Editor

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



Theory and Practice of Yoga

Ed. Knut A Jacobsen

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2008. x + 478 pp. Rs 595.

Written by his students and close associates, the book under review is a collection of essays in honour of Gerald James Larson, a noted scholar of our time on the Sankhya and yoga systems of philosophy. In its twenty essays researchers have, in the main, tried to explore the answers to three important questions: i) How far has the ancient yoga philosophy been influenced by other Hindu systems—such as Sankhya, Vedanta, and Tantra—in resolving certain moot metaphysical questions? ii) How the yogic practices left their mark on such institutions as the Ramananda tradition, which originated in fifteenth-century India, or the seventeenth-century Sufism, and how this influence is still continuing; and iii) How far has this ancient Indian system of philosophy influenced the West—the lives of such illustrious thinkers of the past as Plato, the modern investigations into the human mind such as Carl Jung's analytical psychology, and the life of modern America? The essays can also be viewed independent of any such backdrop and enjoyed separately, with each of them dealing with a distinct issue and each of their authors presenting their treasured legacy. This second approach may in fact be more profitable.

The notion of God found in the *Yoga Sutra*, read independent of the traditional commentaries that might have been influenced by the rise of bhakti tradition, has led Lloyd W Pflueger to 'a rather impersonal and strikingly powerless deity, essentially just pure consciousness, quite in keeping with the constraints of classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga thinking'. But what the original Sankhya-yoga position actually was remains a matter of conjecture. On the basis of available texts T S Rukmani has shown that the evolution of the concept of *jivanmukti*, as seen in the

commentaries on the *Sankhya Karika*, has been considerably influenced by Advaita Vedanta and yoga traditions. This has resulted in an eventual dilution of the original meaning as delineated in the *Karika*. Age-old traditions like Sankhya and yoga, which have witnessed the rise of many different schools of philosophy, cannot remain abstracted from later influences. Advaita Vedanta emphasizes the indivisible unity of the Self through the oneness of Atman and Brahman; the Sankhya-yoga tradition stresses the multiplicity of individual Purushas and their utter isolation from Prakriti in liberation. In spite of such conspicuous differences both systems advocate the witness-hood of the Self. This point of similarity has been highlighted by Richa Pauranik Clements through a cross-examination of Shankara's *Upadesha Sahasri*, Ishvara Krishna's *Sankhya Karika*, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*. Differences in these systems are due to the limitations of their contextual frameworks, and the close parallels in the ontological nature of Brahman-Atman and Purusha cannot be ignored. However, it remains an undisputed fact that even the final realizations are characterized differently in the two systems.

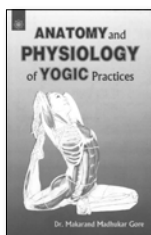
Nandini Iyer begins her argument saying, 'The point I wish to make in this paper is that the opposition between these two schools [Sankhya-yoga and Vedanta] is not the irrevocable either/or dichotomy it is usually assumed to be.' But this thesis she does not establish in her otherwise well-knit paper. She only examines the relative merits and weaknesses of both these systems and calls attention to the inexplicability of Truth and inadequacy of all metaphysical systems, both well-accepted philosophical positions.

Craig Davis's painstaking research is brilliant. His informative paper centres round the Mughal prince Dara Shukuh's [*sic*] Natha-yogic practices, which Dara believed to be both Hindu and Islamic. Sultan-al-azkar, which is but a variant of the traditional *pranayama*, fired the young prince's intuition and led him to relate the process to Prophet Muhammad's experiences and vision on Mt Hira. Tracy Pintch-

man, on the other hand, deals with the current practice of maternal devotion to Sri Krishna through the Kartik Puja, which she graphically describes. Wade Dazey, in her study of the impact of yoga in America over the last hundred and ten years points to the American preference for the 'self' of Vedanta rather than that of classical yoga and tries to uncover the reasons for this.

These, and several other papers—all well-written and scholarly—make this Festschrift particularly valuable. It will surely provide food for thought and light on praxis to many of its readers.

Swami Sanmatrananda
Ramakrishna Mission
Viveknagar



Anatomy and Physiology of Yogic Practices

Dr Makarand Madhukar Gore

New Age Books, A 44, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi 110 028.
2005. xx + 223 pp. Rs 225.

Two kinds of people approach yoga. The first kind is those who wish to learn its practices out of interest. These are normally young in age and come to yoga mainly because of family background or after reading newspaper reports. The second kind consists of people who are suffering from psychosomatic diseases. Having tried all other types of remedies, they come to yoga probably as the last resort. The latter group is increasing in number these days, mainly due to the lopsided lifestyle brought about through cheap money and consumerism.

With the increase in the number of people coming to yoga therapy as a remedy, there is a concomitant rise in demand for yoga therapists. Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla, established by the famous Swami Kuvalayananda, is the oldest institution in India to cater for this need. The author of this book has been associated with this institution for the last three decades. He also has a postgraduate degree in Ayurveda. He is thus eminently qualified to pen a book of this nature.

A medical graduate or practitioner faces no problem in becoming a yoga therapist, since he or she is familiar with the functioning of the human body. But, of late, many people from non-medical backgrounds are taking to this discipline as career. There are not many works that can be used as textbooks

to train them. The first such book was the commentary on *Hathayoga Pradipika*, authored by Swami Muktibodhananda, who had the advantage of medical training. This book has been published by the Bihar School of Yoga. The Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana of Bangalore has also brought out a large number of tracts on applied yoga.

David Coulter's *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga* is the first book to deal with the relationship between the human anatomy and yogic practices. But this book is a hard nut to track. So there has been the need for a book that can introduce the subject in an easily understandable way. The book under review meets that need eminently, a matter of great satisfaction for all yoga therapists.

The book is divided into two parts: 'Basic Anatomy and Physiology' and 'Anatomy and Physiology of Yogic Practices'. The first part consists of eleven chapters and covers the digestive, circulatory, respiratory, muscular, nervous, endocrine, skeletal, and excretory systems, all of which are prone to being affected by psychosomatic problems. The coverage is exhaustive, and the text presented in a reader-friendly format with ample illustrations.

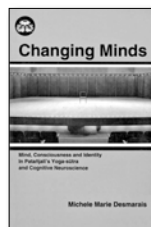
The second part has four chapters, covering *asanas*, *mudras*, *bandhas*, *kriyas*, *pranayama*, and 'the Science of Aum', all described in their relation to the human body and its functions. Yogic practices do vary in minor details from institution to institution; the author has described the standard techniques used at Kaivalyadhama—fully in accordance with tradition, without any new-fangled ideas.

This book will serve as an excellent textbook for students and teachers of yoga therapy.

Dr N V C Swamy

Dean of Academic Programmes

Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana
Bangalore



Changing Minds

Michele Marie Desmarais

Motilal Banarsidass. 2008. xx + 253 pp.
Rs 395.

The last two decades have witnessed a phenomenal popular interest in yoga but have surprisingly been associated with a very significant decrease in studies on yoga, both in its hatha yoga and raja yoga aspects. Against this background, *Changing Minds: Mind, Consciousness and Identity*

in *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtra and Cognitive Neuroscience* is a reassuringly timely appearance and has several distinguishing features.

Using the Sankhya metaphor of Prakriti as phenomenon played out for the Purusha, Dr Desmarais affirms that the only goal that Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* aims for is the final separation of Purusha from the entanglements of Prakriti by transforming mind, consciousness, and identity. She has arranged her book in six chapters using the idiom of the stage play, both for the chapter headings as well as the impressive and aptly symbolic cover. In 'Getting Ready for the Show' she introduces the aims, objectives, and method of her study, especially the reason why she chose to study the *Yoga Sutra* against the background of cognitive neurosciences.

'Entering the Theatre' briefly reviews the yoga traditions before and after Patanjali and outlines the structure of the *Yoga Sutra*. The second chapter, 'Taking the Stage' presents the metaphysics and psychology of the *Yoga Sutra* by examining its technical definitions, tropes, and symbology. In 'All the World's a Stage' a succinct summary of the structure and function of the nervous system is followed by an insightful discussion on the five types of *vrittis*, mental modifications, in the light of modern cognitive neurosciences. Yoga practices are discussed in fair detail and help the reader understand their purport in 'Following the Plot'.

In the fifth chapter, 'The Plot Thickens', the author analyses the transformative effects of yoga practice and explains it in terms of brain plasticity, that 'ability of the brain to undergo adaptive change, especially in response to environmental input and to loss of function due to damage'. And finally, in the sixth chapter, 'Lights Up', she acknowledges that the advanced and final results of yoga practice are beyond the pale of science and scientific investigations to date.

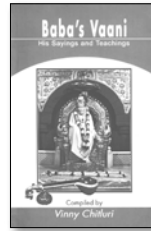
What makes this book particularly valuable is the author's insistence on a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the *Yoga Sutra* throughout her work, which in her own words means that 'we must not ignore philosophy in favor of spirituality, or psychology in favor of philology, or practice in favor of history'. Dr Desmarais is an assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Nebraska, where she teaches Sanskrit, Hinduism, and Buddhism. She is also a teacher-practitioner at Omaha Yoga and Bodywork Center. Her dedicated scholarship on the neurosciences and yoga literature and her reveren-

tial practice of yoga and academics help her come up with many insightful observations, like the one on the role of visual perception in one's identity and how the practice of yoga reverses the same to realize its ultimate aim of *kaivalya*.

This book is a very welcome and valuable addition to the field of yoga, Indology, and cognitive neurosciences—that too priced at Rs 395 only, thanks once again to the efforts of the author and her publishers. It is a must keep for all persons interested in this field and should also adorn the shelves of academic, religious, and scientific institutional libraries.

Swami Varishthananda

Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service
Varanasi



Baba's Vaani:
His Sayings and Teachings
Comp. Vinny Chitluri

Sterling Publishers, A 59, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020.
2008. xii+164 pp. Rs 200.

This collection of the experiences from devotees of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi portrays Baba's simple method of instruction. Largely taken from the diary of Sri Hari Sitaram Dixit, or Kaka Sahib, these are accounts of spiritual transformations involving many people. Subtle aspects of spiritual life and philosophy are brought out through simple revelations in everyday life. Humorous but enlightening, these incidents give us hope that spiritual realization is within our reach. An appealing read for anyone interested in spiritual life, the value of this slim book is enhanced by rare photographs of Baba and his relics along with those of his devotees.

PB

BOOK RECEIVED



Holy Ganga
Ambashankar Nagar;
trans. Jaikishandas Sadani

Bharatiya Vidya Mandir, Ratan Bihari Temple, Bikaner.

An English rendition of the epic poem 'Patit Pawani' presenting the myth and legend of the Holy Ganga from diverse literary sources.

REPORTS

Swami Vivekananda Monument

When Swami Vivekananda visited Bangalore in December 1892, he stayed at Kalappa Choultry for a few days. During that period he sat and rested quite a few times on a stone-bench attached to the



front wall of the house of Sri Sugappa, a jeweller by profession. Later, after discovering that the sanniyasin was none other than Swami Vivekananda, Sri Sugappa and his descendants preserved the slab carefully and with all respect, as a valuable monument. This stone-bench-slab was officially handed over to **Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore**, in

January 1997. A monument to house the slab, built at the ashrama, was consecrated by Swami Bhaumananda on 27 March 2009. On the same day a public meeting, attended by some 1,600 people, was held at the ashrama.

News from Branch Centres

On 27 February **Ramakrishna Math, Madurai**, launched a mobile bookstall with the purpose of taking Ramakrishna-Vedanta literature to people at large.

The first floor of the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math, Coimbatore**, was inaugurated on 27 February.

On 8 March **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore**, organized a spiritual retreat for slum-dwellers of Mysore city. 500 participants enjoyed the serene atmosphere of the ashrama, witnessed a discourse and a film-show specially meant for them, and were sumptuously fed.



Swami Vivekananda monument in Bangalore

Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur, organized the concluding phase of its golden jubilee celebrations with seminars, cultural functions, and an educational exhibition from 5 to 14 March.

On 8 March **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**, organized an All Tripura Devotees' Conference which was attended by 521 devotees.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a monks' quarters and a guest house at **Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati**, on 19 March. Next day he presided at a public function held in the ashrama in which Swamis Mumukshananda, Gautamananda, and Bodhasarananda, among others, also participated.

New guest house at Mayavati



As a part of its educational service activities in rural areas during the financial year 2008–09, **Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor**, distributed uniforms, notebooks, stationery, and other study materials to 7,233 school children of 81 villages who are studying in government primary and high schools.

Achievements

Debajyoti Sengupta, a class-9 student of **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**, won the National Child Award 2007 for his commendable performance in painting. The award, comprising a cash prize of 10,000 rupees, a silver medal, a certificate, and a citation was handed over to him at a function held on 5 February at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.

Students of **Ramakrishna Mission, Shilpa-mandira, Belur**, secured the following ranks in the All Bengal Diploma Examination, held by the West Bengal State Council of Technical Education in June 2008: Mechanical Engineering: 1st and 2nd; Electrical Engineering: 1st.

Anupam Dev Goyal, a member of the students' home at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh**, represented India in the 40th International Chemistry Olympiad held at Budapest, Hungary, from 11 to 20 July 2008, and won a bronze medal.

Anupam Dev Goyal (left) in Budapest



Relief

Flood Relief • **Nadi** centre continued its relief work among flood victims in Fiji distribut-

ing 1,035 textbooks, 851 notebooks, 421 school uniforms, 63 school bags, 930 pens, 1,299 pencils, 1,340 erasers, 279 rulers, and 43 mathematical instrument sets to flood-affected students. Besides, the centre gave value education book packs containing 50 titles each to libraries of 14 schools, and school fees and bus fares to 398 students. The centre is also constructing houses for 2 families who lost almost everything in the flood. In India the following centres conducted post-flood relief work: **Patna** centre distributed 2,611 saris, 4,087 towels, 1,016,600 halogen tablets, and other items to flood victims; **Bhubaneswar** centre distributed 468 school bags, 806 notebooks, 470 pens, 470 pencils, 460 erasers, 470 scales, and 468 value education books to 468 flood-affected students of 3 schools in Cuttack and Puri districts.

Winter Relief • **Belgharia** and **Ooty** centres handed over 990 and 300 blankets respectively to needy people, and **Rajahmundry** distributed 125 thick chadars to leprosy patients.

Fire Relief • **Karimganj** centre gave food items (rice, dal, mustard oil, salt, and spices), cooking utensils (vats, ladles, buckets, mugs, plates, bowls, and glasses), stoves, blankets, and mosquito-nets to 2 poor families whose houses had been gutted by fire at Charbazar area in Karimganj town.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people in their respective areas: **Belgaum**: 375 kg rice, 375 kg flour, 75 kg dal, and 75 kg edible oil; **Belgharia**: 1,545 saris, 1,135 dhotis, 487 lungis, 518 shirts, and 2,622 children's garments; **Chandigarh**: plates, cups, and glasses (50 each); **Katihar**: 65 sets of pants and shirts, and 15 cycles; **Puri Math**: dictionaries, pencils, scales, soap-bars, and disinfectant bottles (100 each). **Rahara** centre sunk a deep tube-well in Pathankhali village, South 24 Parganas district.

Economic Rehabilitation • Under the scheme of self-employment **Guwahati** centre distributed 4 *tatsals* (weaving equipment) and 4 sewing machines, and **Katihar** centre distributed 4 rickshaws and 4 sewing machines.



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